

19세미만 구독불가



하늘가리기

# Lucia

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루 시 아

JOCCA

**Lucia**

– 루시아 –

**- Book 2 -**

**-Author-**

**Covering The Sky**

하늘가리기

# Chapter 10

## The Northern Territory (1)

Some time after Hugo departed, Lucia woke up because she needed to use the bathroom. She hoisted herself up and pulled on a rope to call the maids. She was suffering from heartburn due to the heavy alcohol consumption yesterday. As if the maids were on standby right outside the room, they appeared a second later.

“Your Grace, good morning.”

“I wish to use the washroom, aid me up.”

Leaning on the maids, Lucia managed to get out of bed. When she tried to support herself on her own feet, an ache shot up through her body, causing her to grimace.

“Are you feeling unwell? Shall we call for the doctor?”

Lucia momentarily observed the maids’ expressions. The maids observed the highest form of respect while they spoke, but she couldn’t help feeling like they were telling her ‘We know where and why you are in pain.’

Maybe it was her own inferiority complex, as the maids’ expressions never changed. It was a relief she had the old maids to attend to her. If some of the younger maids in their twenties were attending to her, she would have been very uncomfortable due to her embarrassment.

Lucia understood every part of a maid’s life and habits. In front of their Lords, they would behave with courtesy, as they are educated to keep a blank expression at all times. However, they only kept to that practice when they were in front of the masters. Behind their master’s back, they would laugh and jeer like any other normal human being.

Maids often boarded in the same mansion as their masters, and were limited in their own freedom. Therefore, their interest and source of entertainment would naturally be directed toward their master’s family affairs. Their lives were a repeat of paying attention to their master’s words and habits. In their mundane existence, those

moments felt like events to them.

Back when Lucia worked as a maid(1), she had stuck to concentrating on her tasks. She had been a quiet and sincere maid. Eventually, she had become her master's favored servant and had often attended to her master during grand social events. When Lucia had become her master's favorite, the other maids had looked at her with disdain and had ostracized her.

Had Lucia's personality been more lively, she would have asked her master to punish the other servants and gone about with her head held high. However, all she had cared about was doing her job to the best of her abilities.

One would think that they would be grateful to her for that, but it was not so. They had treated her like a bug. Even so, Lucia hadn't felt hurt seeing their behavior. If one were to listen to their words carefully, they didn't hold any elegant conversations. That was especially true the mornings after their masters came out of the same bedroom. The maids' gossips would become especially bad. Lucia would only sigh listening to what the other maids were laughing over.

These were the Duke's maids, but they would be no different. However, if the maids weren't seen talking that way, there was no way she could do anything to punish them.

It was just a little stressful, because she knew all the dark and dirty secrets that would happen behind the scenes.

"...No need. It will be fine if you assist me for a bit. That's right, yesterday I broke a cup."

"We have already cleaned it up. But please be sure to wear your slippers as a precaution."

She had slept like a log all those hours, without knowing that the maids were entering and leaving the room. It was possible that she had fainted. Lucia was taking slow steps returning to the bedroom, when she stopped in front of the window. The maids, who were supporting her, also stopped and waited for her quietly.

She could see the grand garden just outside the balcony. The place was humongous, she mumbled to herself when she discovered something running toward the mansion at a fast pace.



‘Roy Krotin...?’

He was running like a wild boar that was being hunted. Had something happened this morning? In one look, she could tell it was something important.

“Where is His Grace now?”

“He has already gone to the Northern territory early this morning.”

“...He’s not here?”

“Concerning this, Madam, the head butler is waiting to inform you of the contents right now.”

“You should have let him into the room then.”

“He is not allowed to enter this place...”

“Ah...”

As long as her husband wasn’t with her, other than females, nobody was allowed to enter her bedroom. Xenon was very flexible when it came to laws on adultery, but it was extremely taboo to let a random male inside the master’s bedroom chambers.

They wouldn’t be able to deny a request for divorce without the slightest compensation. It would be alright outside in the gardens, but it was forbidden inside the bedroom chambers. It was a laughable custom since the old times.

There was a different country before the war, who pointed their finger at Xenon, claiming that Xenon was in disorder. Xenon had sent a letter saying they were insulting the country’s royal family, and had managed to receive an apology... But still, Lucia didn’t doubt their words.

“What about the plans to depart this morning?”

“His Grace has ordered for everything to be pushed for tomorrow.”

“Then it must not be anything too urgent. I will talk with the butler later. I wish to rest awhile longer.”

Lucia requested for a cup of honey water and went back to sleep. Roy's desperate expression from a while ago kept glimmering in Lucia's thoughts. The Duke had already left early in the morning, so what did Roy need? Thinking about that was too troublesome, so she fell asleep.



"How could this happen? How?"

Roy was fuming in anger under the shining morning sun. His red hair looked like burning flames at that moment. It was a common sight and nobody seemed interested to watch.

"What about the Crown Prince? Why are you here?"

"Who cares? I didn't agree to do it!" (Roy)

The Crown Prince had agreed to let Hugo leave the capital as long as he left an assuring guard here; Roy being the selected candidate for the deal. It was impossible to predict in which direction Roy would go, but there wasn't anyone who could beat Roy when it came to skill. The only person who could beat Roy into a pulp was Hugo.

Nobody cared about Roy's opinions. Hugo had commanded in his usual style, 'because I said so', while ignoring any of Roy's objections. Two nights ago, Roy had thrown a tantrum, refusing to become Kwiz' guard, and Hugo had given him a bad beating, turning his face black and blue and forcing him into the job.

This morning, the Duke had sent a message to Kwiz by post. Roy had also read the letter while looking over the Crown Prince's shoulder. It was a brief letter explaining that something had happened in the North, so he would be departing to his Northern territories. The moment Roy read the letter, he had run to the mansion as fast as he could, but the Duke was already gone.

"The Lord has already given you your task. It will be better for you to return, it's not good to leave your post empty."

"Ain't nobody got time for that! Things are going bad in the North! How can he leave me out of something so fun?" Dean looked at Roy like he was pathetic.

“You call that something fun?”

“It’s a hundred times more fun than being stuck next to the Crown Prince like a statue! I’m going to follow him.”

“Yeah, right. Give it your best shot. The Lord will kill you on sight.”

Despite Dean’s merciless prediction, Roy locked arms with Dean.

“Hmph, the Lord might beat me to the brink of death, but he’ll never kill me.”

“...You’re so proud of the oddest things. As you said, you won’t die, but you’ll probably lose an arm or a leg. No, wait. He won’t break any of your bones, but he’ll beat you up so bad, you won’t be able to move for about three or four days.”

Roy glared at him with annoyed eyes, but slumped his shoulders in the end. Roy admired his Lord very much, but from time to time, that personality of his was really one of a kind. But other than Roy, the Duke didn’t bother beating up the other knights.

The only person who dared to annoy the Duke was Roy. In another sense, it was quite admirable that he would continue to defy the Duke while suffering such horrible beatings.

“Yes, it’s quite painful. Actually, why are you here? How come you didn’t follow the Lord?” (Roy)

“I’m in charge of escorting Her Grace until we reach the North.” (Dean)

“Ah... His Grace is married now.” (Roy)

Roy mumbled in a flat tone. Others had gaped in shock when they heard about the Duke’s marriage, but Roy had taken the news as it was, without much of a reaction. Roy’s mentality was a bit different than that of the normal population.

“Mm, who has become the Lady of the House? I’ve heard she was a princess.” (Roy)

‘Although I already know about this.’

Roy wasn’t stupid enough to release the Duke’s private information so lightly. Roy would randomly snicker whenever he thought of the day The Duke and the Princess

had met.

The Princess had thrown a straight jab at the Duke, 'I've come to propose a marriage.' At that moment, the Duke had been in total shock. It was so refreshing to see such a petite young miss throw a punch at the Duke.

"I'm a little worried. I'm not used to escorting... nobles." (Dean)

"You'll probably be fine." (Roy)

"Hmm? Have you met the Lady of the House yet?" (Dean)

Roy scratched his head.

"No, but rather... Anyway you'll probably be fine. It's my gut feeling."

Dean burst out laughing.

"Okay. I'll believe that beastly instinct of yours. Anyway, quit while you're ahead and return to your duties. If the butler catches sight of you, he's going to give you an earful."

"Ugh... Jerome... scares me."

Sometimes he was much scarier than the Lord.

"Well, I'm thankful for that."

Roy's face paled upon the voice that resonated from behind them. Jerome had appeared behind them some time ago, and was glaring at them like a hungry savage beast. Roy screamed as if the God of Death was at his door.



When she woke up from her sleep, the midday sun was shining brightly. She could open her eyes, but she couldn't move her body as she wished. It felt like her body had turned into a giant rock and had become attached to the bed. She felt greater fatigue than she had felt in the morning.

'It hurts... '



Her muscle ache was getting worse as time passed. She would be able to calm down if her pain had been subsiding after a long time of rest, but it was not so. It was like he had said, the trip to the North would've been impossible in her current state. The maids attending to her could tell her condition was getting worse, and they looked restless.

"Your Grace, are you feeling very ill?"

"...Would you be so kind as to bring me a light meal? I would like something I'll be able to eat in bed with ease."

Lucia grimaced with pain as she spoke. This morning, her throat had felt only a little dry, but now it felt scratchy and painful.

"Ah, yes. Madam, I'll have it prepared for you right away."

In a short moment, the maids brought in trays of food filled with a variety of little dishes. A warm glass of milk, fruit covered with honey and nuts, a small platter of tiny crackers, bread that was still warm to the touch, along with a variety of other snacks. She got up with the aid of others and ate the dishes one bite at a time. As she filled her stomach, she could feel energy forming inside of her.

She finished her meal and took a bath. After that, she went back to rest awhile longer until the late afternoon. Then she went to the receiving room to talk with Jerome. Although only a single day had passed, Lucia's lively condition had changed to one where she had one foot in the grave. Jerome looked over her with great concern.

"Our Lord has ordered for a doctor upon your request, Your Grace."

"I don't need a doctor. I heard he has gone ahead to the North already."

"Yes, he received an urgent message from the Taran Duchy and left immediately."

Jerome had been feeling restless over whether the Lady of the House would throw a fit of anger due to that. The Duke had left on urgent business, but the couple had gotten married only yesterday. He had left without a single word of goodbye, and to make it worse, there was no telling when the two would be able to meet again.

Lucia had understood from the beginning that her marriage was settled informally due to urgent business in his Duchy. She wasn't upset about it at all.

“When will we leave?”

“Ah, yes. It is scheduled for tomorrow, but the Lord has said there is no need to rush. It will be fine to leave when you feel ready.”

“Since everything has been scheduled for tomorrow, let’s leave tomorrow.”

“Yes, Madam. I wish to discuss a quick briefing of the trip. When would be a good time?”

“As long as everything is prepared, I would like to listen to it now.”

“Yes, Madam. We will depart from the capital to the Taran Duchy in Roam. Roam is the city name as well as the name of the Duke of Taran’s castle. The distance we will need to travel is very far, but we will travel by gate, which will shorten our trip to four days. Have you ever used the gate before?”

“Never.”

Xenon was able to remain as one of the powerhouse nations due their magical device referred to as ‘the gate’. No matter from which border, the latest the Emperor could ever receive a message was one week. Whether there was a revolt or an invasion, he was able to relay commands in an efficient manner. Many countries had discovered such ‘gates’. However, Xenon owned the most gates among all the nations.

In the far distant past, there had been a time when magic was commonplace. But one day, magic had suddenly become near nonexistent. Up to this day, historians were still doing research to figure out the cause of that phenomenon.

When the kingdom of magic had vanished from the world, the mage profession and all their research had disappeared as well. However, magical artifacts remained throughout the world, and were considered treasured antiques. Magical artifacts were usually stored in the national treasury. Among those magical artifacts, there were ones that were embedded into the earth, allowing one to teleport; those magic artifacts were called ‘gates.’

“To reach the nearest gate, it will take about half a day by carriage. We will then teleport to the Northern territories and continue to Roam, which will take another four days”

“The Duke’s castle is four days away from the gate? That’s quite far; don’t people usually build closer to the gate?”

“There are only five gates in the North. The gate positioned nearest to Roam is surrounded by many rocks and boulders, which will make traveling by carriage very troublesome.”

“There are only five? Although the Northern territory is so wide?”

“Yes, there are only five.”

For this reason, the nobles of the North didn’t frequent the capital. It was too difficult to travel back and forth.

“But, Jerome, not anyone is allowed to freely... access the gate. I understand only government officials are allowed to use the gate. Will it be alright even though we’re traveling for personal reasons.”

“Strictly speaking, Madam is correct. The gate is allowed for only government purposes. However, the capital’s main gate allows its use as long as expenses are paid. Additionally, the Duke has stated that he would like to use the gate. Would there be anyone brave enough to question his request?”

“...I see.”

Her husband was an important figure. But that fact hadn’t completely sunk in. The status of a noblewoman was based on her husband or father. Even if one became an Empress, she wouldn’t automatically be recognized by high society. There had never been a case where an unknown low-ranked noblewoman would randomly climb to the top of the social ladder.

Females considered everything belonging to their father and husband as their own property as well. If the Duchess were to display her influence, the baroness would need to cater to the commands of the Duchess. It was not written in law. However, everyone accepted that system.

Inside her dream, she was a Countess. Count Matin possessed territories and held a lot of influence over others due to the Matin Family’s long history in the capital. As such, there were many females of lower status than Lucia.

Even so, Lucia had never stepped over those around herself to feed her own pride. In the first place, Lucia had never felt a sense of proprietorship over Count Matin's assets.

Therefore, Lucia couldn't grasp a concrete sense of her place in the social ladder. If she used her husband's social position to control others like other women, would she end up enjoying it? At the moment, she felt she was only a parasitic existence to the Duke.

"I will introduce you to those who will escort us to the North tomorrow. Do you have any other questions?"

"Is there anything I should be careful of during the trip?"

"If I think of anything, I will inform you tomorrow."

She spent the day relaxing in bed. The next morning, Lucia felt much more energetic.

But there was a different problem. Following the first night with him, the blood flowing from her body wouldn't stop. The bleeding wasn't too intense, but the maids attending to her couldn't help but take notice.

"Madam, as a precaution, let us call for a doctor."

The next day, instead of departing as planned, a female doctor was called.

All the experienced female doctors they had found out were nervously waiting. There were not many female doctors around. It was rare for a woman to be accepted into a formal medical school. Even if one were to become a formal doctor, she would always be compared to her male counterparts.

When a female gave a diagnosis, nobody would accept it as a true and final diagnosis. A noblewoman's bedroom was off limits to men, but male doctors were exempt from that rule. There was no reason for nobles to go out of their way to find a female doctor. The demand for female doctors was low, and the numerous well-known male doctors could be found left and right. Thus, the women who worked in the medical field could barely make a living.

Most of the time, a doctor's wife would be an assistant for many years, then later formally start her education to become a doctor. It was useful when a husband and wife were both doctors. All the female doctors who were found today were of similar circumstances.

But the female doctor called over today was a widow.

It was very rare for a prestigious noble family to request for a female family doctor. She followed the maid to the Lady of the House's bedroom. When she spotted a petite woman waiting while laying in bed, much of her nerves relaxed. She had imagined an overbearing noblewoman, but the patient in front of her looked like a young girl.

"Do you feel uncomfortable anywhere?"

The noblewoman's face was flushed cherry red and could not answer immediately. The woman hesitated and looked to her maid for help. The maid took notice and asked, "Shall I explain in your stead, Madam?" When permission was given, she explained in a quiet but steady voice.

The female doctor, who was listening to the maid's explanation with great concentration, gradually relaxed. She peeked at her patient in bed and swallowed back her laughter. The newlywed bride appeared to be very adorable.

"Your Grace, do you feel pain anywhere?"

"...Just a little when I move..."

"Do you think it's possible that you are menstruating?"

"No."

"Every virgin has different reactions following their consummation. They may bleed a lot or not at all. Sometimes, there are cases where they will bleed for many days. As long as there's no heavy blood flow like when you are menstruating or pain while remaining still, there will be nothing you need to worry about. Your body will fix itself with time. Please do not overwork your body and rest for about another four days, and you will regain your health."

As Lucia listened to the doctor, her face grew increasingly hot. She would've been fine just resting; she needlessly requested for a doctor. It felt like she was announcing to the world the events from last night, and she could not lift her head up from embarrassment.

"Ah, but please do not consummate until you don't feel any pain while moving. A female's reproductive organs are more delicate than they appear. If you're not careful,

you might experience bad side effects.”

“In any case...”

In any case, what? He wasn't here right now, so there was no way to consummate? Did that mean she would do something if he was here? Lucia asked questions to herself while answering them, feeling increasingly embarrassed.

“Ah... Anyway, I understand. Your job is done so be on your way. Thank you for stopping by.”

“You do not require further medication, but I shall prescribe body strengthening medications for you to assist the recovery process.”

After the completion of the prescription, Jerome called the doctor to a separate room.

“Did you think about our offer?”

Once the Duke requested for a talented female doctor, Jerome had searched for one very quickly. There were a handful of talented female doctors in the capital, but it would be difficult to find one back in Roam.

He wouldn't let any orders by his Lord pass by without action. He thoroughly thought of the hidden meanings and fulfilled his duties. It was many times more troublesome to carry out his job in that way, but the job of a butler was his calling in life and he had never in his life thought it was a tiresome job.

He didn't simply find a female doctor for Her Grace. The Duke's family doctor was Philip, a male doctor. It appeared the Duke was not fond of Philip looking out for Her Grace's health. His instincts were usually correct.

Jerome offered for Anna to become Her Grace's personal family doctor. Yesterday, Jerome had asked Anna to stop by the mansion, and when he asked if she could look over a patient for him, she had agreed.

“You told me that I do not need to leave the capital for good.”

“Yes, after a few years, you may return to the capital.”

“I will accept your offer.”



Anna didn't want to leave this place full of many memories, but she lived by herself and it was difficult to find such a stable job with a prestigious noble family. Jerome laughed with a polite smile.

"I welcome you into the Duke of Taran's family, Anna."

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Foot notes:

(1) Back when (Lucia) worked as a maid – In Lucia's dream, she worked as a maid following her divorce with Count Martin.

# Chapter 11

## The Northern Territory (2)

Lucia slept her days away, recovering. She had to rest for another two days for the bleeding to stop. She felt much better, and although her inner thighs were a little sore when she moved, it was bearable.

Lucia was the only person at leisure before the departure; everyone else around her was busily taking care of last minute necessities. Jerome was mainly focused on checking the food rations and emergency medicine for their travel, as well as the necessary commodities for Her Grace's comfort.

14 employees worked together to plan out a detailed itinerary of their trip to the North. Lucia and her two maids, Jerome, Anna, the three mute siblings, five servants, and four knights were going to be traveling together. While Lucia was enjoying her last tea time in the receiving room, Jerome decided to introduce her to the four knights who would be traveling with them. When Lucia agreed, Jerome brought the knights into the room.

'I thought Sir Krotin would be with us.'

Among the knights, she couldn't recognize any of them. Sir Krotin had run into the estate so vehemently, leaving a deep impression in her mind. However, she thought it would be rude to ask about a different person in front of all these people, so she decided against the idea.

One of the knights was in his mid-twenties, while the other three were about four to five years older. All of them were standing by the door, motionless like a statue. They stood a great distance away from Lucia, who was sitting on the sofa in the receiving room.

"Jerome, is there a reason the knights have to stand so far away?"

"No. However, it is just a precaution in case Your Grace feels scared seeing them up close."

The knights were tall and bulky in build, and with the addition of armor, they appeared like giants. All of the knights were equipped with a long sword by their hips. Often times, females would be frightened to death seeing them up close.

“It’s fine. Tell them to come closer. I should at least be able to recognize their faces. If an emergency situation occurs, it wouldn’t be right to stand so far away like this.”

To Lucia, the knights’ tall and bulky build didn’t scare her at all. If that were the case, she wouldn’t have been able to approach the Duke at all. She had learned in her dream that a person’s physique didn’t define the person. Inside her dream, she had experience in running a small shop, repairing the knights’ armors and weapons.

“Understood, Madam.”

The knights walked closer until they were only a few steps away. Jerome introduced their names one by one, while the knights gave a courteous nod as their names were mentioned. Among the knights, the eldest one spoke up.

“Your Grace, we will do our best to protect you while providing the best comfort possible. Madam, there is only one thing you must keep in mind. I’m sure this situation would never happen, but in case we become tangled in a dangerous situation, please do not leave Sir Heba’s side.”

The leader of the knights introduced her to Sir Dean Heba. He was the youngest knight of the four.

“Why? Why is Sir Heba to guard me instead of the knights’ leader?”

“That is because Sir Heba is the most skilled among the four of us.”

“I don’t understand. A knight’s rank is to be decided based on skill, not age, according to my knowledge.”

The knights glanced at each other with a strange glint in their eyes. That rule was not written in law, but it was followed by everyone. It was a secretive tradition only known by those who worked closely with other knights.

“That is... because Sir Heba is...”

When the knights’ leader couldn’t reply, Dean answered personally.

“I will explain it for you. I am not of noble birth, nor have I been formally adopted by any knight companies. I’m a knight of commoner blood.”

“So?”

Dean thought his words would be enough to convince Lucia, but he was taken aback when she questioned him instead.

“Because... Maybe Your Grace would feel uncomfortable.”

“To put it shortly, you thought I would feel distrust toward a knight of common birth.”

“...It is so.”

“Your birth status does not decide your skills. I do not wish to break the regulations of knights. Sir Heba, please be in charge of leading the knight company.”

Dean’s eyes trembled as he gazed at Lucia, then bowed his head.

“Yes, Madam.”

He answered with a lot more respect.

When Jerome let the knights leave, he expressed his shock.

“Madam, I didn’t know you were aware of the knights’ regulations. Truthfully, I was afraid you would feel uncomfortable with the knights and worried very much. Sir Heba is very talented despite his young age. He did not have to go through a probation period to be promoted into an official knight.”

“Oh my. That’s only possible after winning first in a fencing or horseback competition. He must be very skilled. How surprising. Based on his appearance alone, he looks very innocent.”

“Madam, you surprised me once more. You are very knowledgeable.”

Lucia answered with a slight smile.

She had not run the smithy for very long, but the experience had affected Lucia’s life a lot. Count Matin had been obese, making his overall body frame appear very large.

Despite his short stature, she had always felt intimidated by him.

While she ran the small smithy, the knights who visited her were much taller and bigger boned. Sometimes they had a frightening appearance, but they were all very gentle giants who couldn't be compared to Count Matin. Thanks to them, Lucia had been able to open up and trust others much easier.

Of course, there had been a fair amount of human trash among those people. They would demand repairs but put off the payments for later. Later meaning never. From time to time, the other knights would catch and beat up the trash for her. The difference between hired mercenaries and knights was like the ground and the sky. Knights held an exponentially higher amount of pride for their weapons than the other.

If the ending to that story was beautiful, life would have been perfect.

She had fallen in love with a man and gone bankrupt, losing her smithy. At first, she had believed he was a knight, but later she had found out that was not the case. He was a knight who had been fired for an unknown reason. The other knights had been enraged that the honor of knights had been disgraced, and had helped to track him down. However, the money that was gone couldn't be retrieved.

The man had been handsome and strong, she should have been suspicious of his intentions from the start. He had never demanded bodily pleasures and had showered her with platonic love. She had mistaken that man's heart as something pure and innocent.

"Sir Krotin will not be joining us?"

Jerome's face froze for a short moment.

"How do you know of Sir Krotin?"

"I saw him running to our estate just a few days ago. I thought he was going to join us."

"That's not the case. He has been commanded to protect the crown prince."

"You seem to dislike Sir Krotin."

"...Rather than dislike... He's just troublesome."

‘Sir Krotin is probably not such a bad guy.’

If Jerome’s words meant that Krotin was bad-tempered and wild, she understood perfectly. That was probably the reason why he had earned the nickname ‘Crazy Dog.’ Lucia imagined a gentle but wild dog rolling around while running here and there.



Her first experience using the gate was disappointing. Her surroundings grew dark and she felt dizzy for a moment, and that was it. It was surprising that she teleported such a long distance in the blink of an eye, but it had been a lie that she would be able to see the vast land while traveling in between the two locations.

Three carriages ran along a vast barren land. One carriage carried Lucia and a few other women. The latter two were designated for servants and knights so that they could rest in rotations throughout the trip.

The journey was going smoothly. It had not rained a single drop throughout the trip, which helped a lot. They would travel for hours and stop for short meals, then continue traveling. Then, they would stop to camp, and as soon as the sun peeked out, they would be on the road once again. They could have taken the longer route, taking twice the time, so their rest points could be located in small villages and towns, but they had chosen the shortest route possible, which didn’t have a single village until they reached their destination.

It was the last night they had to camp outside. They would arrive at the castle by midday tomorrow. The surrounding knights pointed to a suitable place to camp out and ordered the servants to prepare the site.

As soon as the carriage came to a halt, Jerome reined his horse next to Lucia’s carriage and knocked on her window. During the whole trip, Jerome didn’t ride inside the carriage, but rode along with the other knights by horseback. The window, that had been closed to block out the dust, opened.

“Your Grace, we will be camping here for the night.”

“Is it okay to get off now?”

Jerome turned to the knights. After scanning the safety of the area, they nodded.



“Yes, it’s alright.”

In a short moment, Lucia and several other females got off the carriage. Everyone’s faces were pale with fatigue.

Sitting in a shaking carriage for a prolonged period of time was very exhausting. The roads were not paved smoothly like in the capital, so the carriage had kept rattling in varying degrees without stop.

Lucia endured the whole journey in silence. She didn’t speak a word of complaint, thus the other females couldn’t complain either. Thanks to Lucia, everyone was able to arrive at their destination in record speed.

“Your Grace, are you feeling nauseous at all?” (Anna)

“I’m fine. Thanks for your help earlier, I feel much better.”

The journey was nausea and headache inducing. Anna didn’t simply prescribe medication to help with Lucia’s discomforts, she also used a special technique of massaging unique pressure points on the hand to reduce nausea and headache through the whole trip. Her skills helped a lot during their travel.

Lucia and Anna went for a brisk walk in a nearby area. Just a short distance behind, Dean followed quietly. During the whole trip, Dean was in charge of escorting the Duchess.

The other people all helped set up the camp site. They fed the horses, prepared the meals, and collected firewood for the night. They chose a flat camp site, while making sure no wild animals were hiding around.

A knight in the distance gazed at Lucia’s tiny figure, and spoke of the feelings surging through his heart.

“As long as it’s a person like her, I’ll be glad to accept any escorting job one hundred times over.”

The other knights joined in the discussion.

“A wonderful person has become the lady of the house for the Duke of Taran.”



A thin layer of frost had covered the land when they awoke to continue their journey early the next morning. They went on traveling all morning, until they stopped for an early lunch.

“Madam, we’re almost there. Can you see over there? That is Roam.”

Jerome pointed to a place where the yellow dirt road ended and was instead replaced by green grass. A little further ahead, she could see buildings of varying height poking upwards into the sky. At the center of all the structures, stood a grand castle – their destination.

As soon as Lucia was able to see Roam, all the terrible fatigue of the journey flew away and was replaced by excitement. The person she wanted to meet and get to know was inside that place.

She had been 40 when she learned that the Duke of Taran had a child to inherit his position. At the time, his child had just passed adulthood (male: 19, female: 17), and would have been around 20. If she calculated the years from that time to now, his son should be about four or five years old now.

As soon as the carriage rolled into the grasslands, she didn’t have to worry about the dust any longer, so she opened the window. She enjoyed the fresh air breezing through the window, while appreciating the passing scenery. The knights on horseback were riding within a short distance around the carriage. Among them, Jerome was also riding on horseback.

‘Jerome is only a butler, but... he seems very friendly with the other knights.’

Jerome rested in the carriage for just a short while in the middle of their trip, but most of the time, he rode along and rested with the other knights, while talking about random things. The butler and the knights didn’t seem related in any way, but they looked very friendly with each other.

They arrived early. They had estimated that they would arrive in the late evening, but it was only early afternoon. The carriage rushed to the Duke’s castle in Roam, the capital of the North.

The civilians paused and gossiped among themselves as the carriage passed. The carriage Lucia was riding showed off the crest of the black lion.

When they crossed the bridge leading to the castle, loud horns sounded all around.

There were observation towers placed at various points around the outer walls. Within, there were military training grounds and schools. Spacious rooms were available for knights to rest in, as well. All the knights who were training stopped at once, saluting and bowing to the passing carriage.

The carriage continued toward the inner castle and stopped at the central tower.

At the central tower, dozens of maids and servants were there to greet them. Jerome opened the carriage door and several maids exited and propped the set of stairs from the hidden compartment beneath the carriage. Lucia descended the stairs, while Anna followed behind her.

Lucia looked around the place. The stone walls of the central tower seemed to reach the skies. There were many other miniature towers attached to the central tower. About a hundred servants stood in order with their heads bowed.

“Madam, please come in.” (Jerome)

Lucia followed behind Jerome while passing the many servants of the castle. The central tower gate was made out of a heavy wood that looked like steel. When the massive gate opened, it revealed a spacious hall.

“Madam, you’ve endured a lot during this long journey.

“I wasn’t the only one enduring. Everyone worked hard. Jerome, please give your attention to everyone who traveled together on this journey so that they can have a good rest.”

“Yes, Madam. I will arrange everything for the others, so you do not need to worry. Madam, what would you like to do next? If you would like to rest, I will lead you to your bed chambers.”

“I would like to greet the people of this castle.”

“It will be alright to greet the employees slowly at a later time.”

“I don’t mean the employees. I wish to greet the Duke’s parents. If his father isn’t here, his mother is also fine. I wish to greet his direct relatives.”

“There are no such people here.”

“Nobody... at all?”

“Yes. The prior Duke and Duchess have long left the world. This includes his direct relatives and siblings. His Grace, the Duke is the only remaining blood line of the Taran family.”

Lucia’s thoughts became complicated.

‘The only? How about his son?’

She refrained from inquiring about that. It could be that his son had not been revealed to anyone yet. But the Duke had spoken of the matter like it wasn’t a great secret.

“...I’m not that tired. I wish to look around this place.”

“I will guide you around the castle.”

Although it was very spacious, the layout of the place was quite simple.

“The first floor consists of many receiving rooms, conference rooms, and a dining hall. When you exit through the dining hall side door, you will be able to enter the castle’s garden.”

“There is a garden here? I want to see it.”

“...Please do not hold any high expectations.”

When Lucia entered the garden, she was at a loss for words. The garden was incredibly vast, but although it was spring time, not a single flower could be found. Only green trees and bushes grew throughout all of the four seasons of the year.

“ ... ”

In embarrassment, Jerome let out a small cough.

“Due to administrative reasons...”

“...If you were going to bring the garden to this state, why did you create it in the first place?”

“The past duchess built this garden when she was alive. While the Lady of the House was absent, the garden was reduced to this state. The garden would become too ghastly if left abandoned, thus we decided to manage it in this fashion.”

“Was it the Duke who ordered this?”

“The Duke doesn’t put his mind to things like the garden.”

“...”

That’s right. Of course it would be that way.

She decided to return to the first-floor hall.

“If you go up to the second floor by climbing the stairs to the left, you will find yourself in the private quarters of His and Her Grace. The two of you have your own private bedroom, receiving room, and washroom. If you go up to the second floor using the stairs to the right, you will find yourself at Our Lord’s oval office. The two places are both on the second floor, but it is impossible to access directly. You must return to the first floor and use the stairs to access either place.”

“Jerome. I have something to ask you.”

All that time, Lucia couldn’t stop thinking about his son. It could be that the identity of his son was still a secret, but Jerome should know about him.

“Just a while ago, you stated that His Grace is the only remaining blood line of the Taran Family.”

“Yes, Madam.”

“But... he has a son.”

Jerome’s face turned blank.

“...Excuse me?”

“His Grace has a son, so he is not the only remaining blood line of the Taran family, right?”

“Madam... You were... aware?”

“Of course I know about it.”

“...I thought you wouldn't know of him.”

“Oh my, Jerome. Did you think His Grace wouldn't inform me of his son? He's not such a person.”

Jerome had known the 'type' of person the Duke was.

“I thought I would be able to meet his son as soon as I arrived. Where is he now?”

“The Young Lord... is currently not in Roam.”

“Where is he now?”

“He is currently attending a boarding school.”

“Don't tell me it's because of me?”

“No it isn't. His Grace had decided that for the Young Lord since a long time ago.”

“Since a long time ago? How old is the Young Lord?”

“This year, he is eight.”

She was surprised because his son was much older than she had originally thought. Eight years old? How old was the Duke when he'd had his son? Doing the math, he would be 17 or 18.

‘...So you were premature.’

If he had a son at 17, how early had he started getting intimate with others? Even though the current society accepted the sexual relations of men and women, it was



still considered quite early.

“...When will the Young Lord come home?”

“I’m not sure. Since the Young Lord left for boarding school, he has not returned once.”

“Not once...? Then has His Grace gone to see his son?”

“According to my knowledge, he has never made a school visit.”

Lucia became confused. Didn’t he favor his son very much? Wasn’t he the reason why he went through with the marriage? Although the child was born out of wedlock, she thought the Duke loved his son to the point that he would confer his own title of Duke to him.

“Madam, if you have any further questions on the Young Lord, it would be better to ask His Grace personally. I am not allowed to divulge any information so rashly.”

“...I understand. What is his son’s name?”

“The Young Lord’s name is Demian.”

Demian. Lucia repeated his name over and over.



Roam was an old castle just under a hundred years old. Though outwardly the castle looked like an antique, the inside was comfortable and clean due to the careful maintenance and remodeling through the years. Lucia loved every bit of the place. She felt satisfied with her life. She didn’t have to lift a finger and her meals would be prepared. Her beddings would be cleaned automatically and her bath would be prepared by others. There was no way she could complain about anything.

Jerome entered the receiving room. He had a plate in one hand. He made intricate movements while laying the plate down onto the table in front of Lucia. While he was setting the tea set, Lucia didn’t hear the tiniest clattering sound.

Usually people would have separate butlers for the capital and the Duchy, but in Jerome’s case, he was responsible for both places. Jerome was a very competent butler. He was still young; it was incredible he had such talent.

“Madam, this is a freshly baked pie.”

The pie was golden brown and the sweet scent of apples wafted from it.

“Oh my, it looks delicious. Thank you for the meal.”

“Please do not eat too much. You won’t be able to finish dinner.”

“Won’t it be alright to make do for dinner with this? If I eat this way every day, I’ll get fat.”

Breakfast and lunch were prepared simply, but dinner was always a grand feast that wouldn’t lose to any banquet. She was worried that at that rate, the Duke would become broke. Not to forget all the snacks in between meals, as well.

Jerome was very friendly. It wasn’t just him; everyone was on their best behavior, doing their best, in fear that Lucia would become depressed. That was the reason they were putting so much effort into her meals.

She had just gotten married, and right off the bat, she had to live in a strange place all alone, without her husband anywhere in sight. Usually, females would cry their eyes out, but Lucia’s speed of adaptation was like a cactus in the desert.

“Jerome. I’m curious about one thing.”

“Yes, Madam. Please speak.”

The capable butler of the Duke’s castle gracefully filled her tea like usual.

“The roses of goodbye are sent by Jerome, right?”

The teapot in Jerome’s hand dropped to the table and its contents spilled all over. Jerome watched the tea spilling onto the floor in a daze. He had just made a mistake he could never retract. A few seconds later, Jerome snapped out of his daze and set the emptied teapot upright, then ordered the maids to bring a towel.

“My apologies, Madam.”

“It’s alright. The tea did not splash onto me. Rather, whose idea was the roses of goodbye?”

“...”

Cold sweat dripped down Jerome's back. He unconsciously swerved his eyes around the room looking for someone to help him, but he couldn't find anyone. Jerome's usual relaxed and respectful expression was nowhere to be found, and was replaced by a nervous and stern expression as if he was about to jump into grave danger.

“After thinking about it for so long, I don't believe the Duke would be so detailed. I don't think he would order you to send out roses of goodbye personally.”

“...Madam, that is...”

“It's okay, I know everything already. It's your idea, right Jerome?”

“...Yes. I started it arbitrarily...”

“You send red roses as a message of goodbye? Isn't that a bit cruel?”

“...They're... yellow. Yellow roses.”

“Ah, so they were yellow roses. Why did you pick yellow of all colors?”

“...The yellow rose holds a message of goodbye among its many meanings.”

“Wow, really? How do you know so much? You must be a huge romanticist, Jerome.”

Lucia's voice was bright and energetic all this time so Jerome was able to gradually relax his nerves. When the maids came in to clean up the mess, it felt like his heart was also getting organized.

“...My younger brother's wife runs a flower shop. From time to time, they tell me about various flowers and I remembered this particular information.”

Of course, he always bought the roses from his sister-in-law's shop. Fabian considered this killing two birds with one stone. Achieving everything in one fell swoop was the best for everyone's happiness. His sister-in-law would pour all her heart and soul to make the most beautiful bouquet possible.

“So you had a younger brother.”

“Oh, it seems I didn’t tell you. His Grace’s personal aide, Fabian, is my younger brother. Have you met Fabian yet?”

“Ah, of course. The two of you are really...”

“Yes, we don’t look alike. Even so, we are twins.”

“Goodness, that’s a surprise. There are many twins in the Duke’s estate. There’s Jerome, the main chef brothers are also twins, the maids are twins as well. That’s very interesting. Oh, don’t tell me the three siblings... Ah, they were siblings but not twins.”

“Madam, after listening to your words, it seems to be so. His Grace also had a twin as well.”

“He had a brother?”

Jerome quickly shut his mouth. He’d made a mistake. In that quick short moment, he’d made two huge mistakes. A slip of the tongue at that. It was one of the mistakes the Duke looked down upon the most. Jerome’s face was full of despair and embarrassment. Lucia quickly caught onto everything.

“Could it be something I shouldn’t know of?”

“...That’s not the case. His twin has long since passed away. It’s something you would’ve found out eventually, but it would be better to keep it hidden... And not talking about this topic in front of His Grace would be for the best.”

Lucia was more curious about his brother than the roses, but Jerome seemed very troubled, so she took pity on him and changed topics.

“Okay. Let’s continue talking about the roses. Who did you send the roses to last?”

Cold sweat formed upon Jerome’s rigid face. Jerome rather preferred talking about the Duke’s twin brother than this topic. If someone could rescue him from this position, he would embrace them while sharing a deep kiss.

“I told you, everything is fine. Is it perhaps Lady Lawrence?”

“...Yes, how did you know...?”

“I somehow got to know of it. Oh, if the last person who received the roses was Lady Lawrence... Then how about Countess Falcon?”

Jerome was on the brink of going crazy. Bombs kept exploding out of the Madam's mouth. A thing like composure could not be found on Jerome's face. Nobody had ever given him a hard time like at the current moment.

“After His Grace broke up with Lady Lawrence, he was meeting with Countess Falcon. Shouldn't the last person to receive the roses of goodbye be the Countess?” (Lucia)

“..”

“It's okay. Just tell me the truth.”

The pitiful Jerome did not realize the true fear of when a woman spoke the words ‘It's okay, so tell me everything’. If Fabian were there, he would say, ‘This is why you can't date.’ While clicking his tongue.

“...His Grace has not given me the order to do so...”

“Hmmn...”

Lucia slightly pouted her lips.

“That means His Grace is still meeting with the Countess.”

“It's not! That's not true at all! He has never gone to meet her after the wedding. I will swear to the heavens up above.”

Lucia burst out laughing.

“Why are you getting so serious? What's wrong with meeting her?”

“Huh?”

“It's nothing. Anyway, thank you.”

“...You're welcome.”

For some reason, Jerome felt scared of Her Grace.

“Ah, also...”

“Yes?”

Jerome was startled. ‘Madam, PLEASE!’ he wanted to beg, but the words stopped just before his throat.

“Why are you so shocked? I was going to ask you about the maids who will be attending to me.”

It felt like someone had pushed him off the cliff and another person had caught him just in time. Jerome found relief and returned to the image of a courteous butler.

“Yes, Madam. Is there anything to your dislike?”

“That’s not it. Please do not designate a single made to attend me. Let them take turns every few days.”

“Has the maid attending to you made any mistakes?”

“If I favor any one maid, it will cause discord and friction among them. I don’t wish for any troublesome conflicts in the future. If the maids happen to split into different cliques, it may seem like not such a big deal, but it can become the source of all troubles in the future.”

Lucia was well aware of the maids’ lives and thoroughly thought of this new structure. While she worked as a maid, she thought the structure would produce the right environment to prevent any friction between all the different maids.

Lucia could not agree with her masters when they discriminated and favored the maids without discretion. Why would they act so illogically and stir up trouble for themselves?

Jerome blinked several times while staring at Lucia, then nodded his head.

“...Yes. I will carry out your orders.”

Aah. Her Grace was a very surprising woman. The servile spirit within Jerome started to react as adrenaline pumped through his veins. In his life, he expected to feel that way for only one person. It seemed he would carry two masters in his heart very soon.

# Chapter 12

## The Northern Territory (3)

The Northern territory had been under the control of the Taran nobles for an uncountable number of years, to the point that their reign had become unshakable. It was an unwritten rule that even the emperor could not interfere with the North's activities. With such power, the Taran nobles could have seceded to form an independent country, but they had not revolted against the emperor even once.

Most of the population saw the Duke of Taran as the North's King. Even so, the duke's rank only reached the level of the emperor's vassal. Even without orders, the North paid their taxes; when at war, they were the first to fight in the front lines; additionally, they were the ones to take care of the conflicts with the borderland barbarians. If the emperor were to rub the North the wrong way, the duke could possibly shout for secession, causing a great headache. Not all past generations of emperors held the same opinion, but as long as the emperor had a bit of wisdom, he would know the best option was to leave the North to its own devices.

The Taran family had always defended their position as the rulers of the North. They did not interfere with the politics in the capital one bit; they only focused on the problems related to the North. However, that trend had begun to change the slightest bit seven years ago.

The previous Northern Duke had suffered an abrupt death, and the current duke had been conferred the position at the mere age of 18. As soon as he had become the new duke, he'd had to leave his Northern territory and become the vanguard of the various wars occurring throughout the empire.

Duke Taran's military achievements had swept through the battlefields. His art of war had made the heavens and the earth tremble. Knights from other units, who got a chance to fight alongside the duke, had become his loyal followers regardless of who their original masters were.

While Duke Taran had been earning military merit, the Northern territory had been peaceful. The North had been a distance away from the war. No matter how much havoc Duke Taran had caused, the North suffered no consequences.

Hugo never received a formal test to see whether he was qualified to rule over the vast Northern land. He was young and had left the Northern territory on its own for a long time. People had begun to suspect that his only talent was in the art of war, and that his qualification as a ruler was nonexistent. Those were the voices of the ones discontent with the way Duke Taran ruled his territory.

In other territories, the dukes would impose taxes onto the counts of various regions. When the regions paid their imposed taxes, the counts would be given the authority to rule their land as they saw fit.

However, the Northern territory was governed differently. The Taran family controlled all its regions with minute detail. That included everything from taxes to the everyday laws concerning all the citizens. Each past generation of dukes of the Taran family forbade any form of tyranny in any of their regions. The commoners in the Northern territory lived peaceful lives, but many nobles of the North believed that the duke had unfairly stolen their governing rights from them.

The nobles living a safe distance away from the barbarian borderlands felt the duke's military powers were unnecessary to their lives. Those regions, as well as other nobles living closer to the capital, had formed ties and mocked the duke together. They had planned to submit a formal request to the emperor for a secession from the Northern territory, to formally become an independent territory in the Empire. That wasn't all; they had secretly increased the taxes behind Duke Taran's back, and had made a secret fund that would be used for their own private military units.

But those people had made a fatal mistake. They didn't understand the duke's true personality at all.

“Uugh...”

He couldn't breathe properly because his throat was being strangled. His body felt heavy like it was digging itself into the earth. His head hurt as if a steel pipe was being jammed into it. Count Brown blinked wearily.

He tried to properly open his eyes, but he couldn't. A warm liquid was flowing down from his forehead, and it kept dripping into his eyes. He wiped his forehead roughly with his trembling hands and found clotted blood covering it.

A chilling feeling of dread spread across his back. The count looked back and surveyed



his surroundings. The place looked familiar. This was inside the halls of his castle.

He heard muffled crying from somewhere. The count turned around and his eyes grew wide. In a single corner, dozens of people were gathered in a kneeling position. Their faces were stained with messy tears as they hyperventilated and blubbered all at the same time. They clamped their own mouths with the palm of their hands and their breaths were spastic, making for a miserable sight.

He was familiar with them all – his wife, children, and even some of his most loyal subordinates. The people who were slightest bit involved with Count Brown were all there.

He was going to ask what they were all doing there, but his voice wouldn't come out. When Count Brown looked to his family, and their faces turned a degree uglier and messier while bursting into horrible wailing cries. Their eyes were filled with despair and resentment toward Count Brown and he couldn't do anything.

“We’ve let a rat escape.”

“Apologies, My Lord Duke.”

The sound of footsteps followed the voices. The sound of leather shoes clacking on the stone floor echoed louder and louder. A group of people entered the hall through the opened door. One person was leading the group, while the others followed behind the man.

Count Brown's eyes grew wide and his body shook like a poplar tree. The leading man had black hair and red eyes. All the residents of the Northern territory identified those unmistakable characteristics. The dukes of Taran all had black hair and red eyes. Even if a person had never seen the Northern territory dukes their whole lives, they would still be able to identify this person instantly.

The count glanced to the side. The moment Count Brown's eyes met with the duke's, he was frightened out of his wits and began to panic while retreating backwards. The duke drew closer to the count; it was as if a snake was drawing closer to a trembling frog. The count couldn't do anything but bow his head and look at the floor.

The duke paused just a step away from the count. He put his cold long sword under the count's jaw, forcing him to look up.

The count wondered why he didn't choose to remain unconscious on the ground. The black-haired man was armored in a single black chest plate stained all over with something. The exact color staining the chest plate could not be seen, but it should have been blood. Especially seeing that the duke's sleeves and pants were drenched in blood.

The duke's sword being held against the count's neck was dyed red with blood. The black-haired man's face was splattered with blood. The count felt hot liquid spilling down his pants. When Duke Taran saw the count piss himself, he furrowed his brows.

"Count Brown. Correct?"

"Yes... Yes."

"Your son, who was to inherit your position, escaped alone. Do you have any idea where he could have run off to?"

"Huh?"

*Tch*, Hugo clicked his tongue. The guy had lost most of his sanity and it was too late to get any reliable answers. It seemed it would take a while longer to catch the rat. Hugo stuck his hand out and made a hand signal. A knight immediately brought forth a document. Hugo threw the papers at the count's feet.

"That signature, you were the one to sign it. Correct?"

The count took hold of the document with trembling hands and skimmed over it. It was the petition he was going to send to the emperor. All the related nobles' signatures were neatly organized, along with his own. The ground he was standing on suddenly felt like a bottomless pit. It was as though death was looming right beside him.

"A... trial. I wish to request from the emperor a trial..."

The count's jaw trembled without stop. Count Brown was duke Taran's vassal, but at the same time, Count Brown was also the emperor's vassal. As one of the emperor's vassals, he had the right to request the emperor to mediate for him. Even though this was the duke, the count couldn't stand around quietly and accept the judgement of treason against the Empire.

"A trial."

A monotone voice mumbled out.

“He says the same things as the guy from this morning.”

The count felt a chilling fear wash over his whole body. He heard Death whispering in his ears. Without hesitation, he prostrated himself on the floor.

“Please have me-mercy! Spare me my life! Your Grace!”

His only thought was to get out of this situation with his life. He was prepared to do anything for his life. The count wanted to show how much accumulated wealth he could offer to the duke, but he couldn't gather enough courage to speak. It felt like he was suffering a heart attack, his chest felt tight. Tears started uncontrollably spilling from his eyes.

“They seem to be exact clones of each other.”

His voice was full of disdain.

“Lift your head.”

The count lifted his head very fast as if someone was pulling on his hair. His eyes met indifferent blood red eyes. One couldn't find the smallest amount of rage or excitement. The count was scared exactly because of that reason. He could feel the hidden killing intent that was behind those indifferent eyes. Those were the eyes of a predator lying in wait to pounce on its prey.

“Kugh... Have mer... cy...”

The count watched the sword dig deep into his heart. Even so, he didn't think to try and step back, and simply stood there trembling. The sword continued to stab deeper and the count's body convulsed exponentially worse. His eyes rolled to the back of his head as blood spurted from his mouth.

The knights had already witnessed the duke's murderous nature many times before, and had become numb to the sight. Instead, they were watching the duke with admiration. ‘That maneuver is very difficult. He didn't use his full strength, but his sword pierced through the armor into the flesh as if the count were made out of tofu.’ That was the reason Fabian called all of the duke's hand-picked knights crazy.

Hugo didn't flinch even once while watching the various emotions emerge on the dying person's face. He continued to push his sword in until the spasming body turned into a corpse. That person had died more from horror than the pain. As soon as that person's breath ceased, he swiftly pulled his sword out of the body and slashed it across the neck.

*Thump.*

The bones snapped and the severed head rolled on the floor.

"Kyaa!"

"Aaah!"

The count's relatives, who were gathered in the corner, broke their silence and started screaming.

"Noisy."

When the knights heard the duke's low voice, they peered at each other and started walking toward the count's people. As the knights drew closer, the gathered nobles began to wail.

"Your Grace!!"

Fabian yelled while running in.

"You cannot kill them all! Then, nobody will be left to work here! The administration will be at a standstill!"

The knights paused in their steps; the remaining family members clamped their mouths shut while trying to muffle their cries, and looked toward Fabian like he was their hope of life. The duke was frightening like a vampire drenched in blood. Nevertheless, Fabian didn't seem affected by that at all, and yelled while stomping his feet.

"I thought I told you to bring some people to Roam."

"Do you think the population of Roam is high? There is a limited amount of people who are qualified to work here."

“There are no exceptions.”

A total of 13 lords had conspired together, and Hugo had visited seven locations thus far. Six regions were turned into a mess after his visit. The lords' vassals and any of their remaining children were killed in cold blood. The number of people killed had amounted to a few hundred.

“Can't you make a few exceptions? The amount of work after all your surprise visits has piled so high that my back is going to break. Break, I tell you!”

“I'll exterminate all sources of possible troubles. What are you doing? Do you expect me to do everything myself?”

The knights complied and immediately drew their swords. A pandemonium of swords clashing, screams, and cries exploded. In a few moments, about 50 people had turned into a pile of meat. The smell of blood quickly filled the halls.

“Hhaa...”

Fabian let out a deep sigh. He could see his work snowballing bigger and bigger. Ah, really! Why did they have to monkey around without knowing their place and increase his workload! Fabian felt more concerned for his holidays than all the people dying in front of his eyes. In the eyes of the knights, Fabian seemed much crazier than them.

‘I've already predicted this, but... he really kills all these people like bugs.’

Fabian's thoughts on the cruel reality were short. He had become too accustomed to it. All the blame had gone to those who had started the mess in the first place.

‘If it were me, I would rather choose suicide. Those idiots.’

These nobles didn't understand the Northern Ruler's temper at all. Hugo hated making anything complicated. When something got tangled into a mess, he would rather cut it off than try and attempt to untangle it again. If he was unsatisfied with something, there was no such thing as forgiveness. Fabian thought his Lord Duke was too cruel from time to time, but it was a hundred times better than an indecisive ruler.

“We will depart tomorrow morning.”

“Yes!”

The knights answered firmly. Fabian, who stood to the side, let out a heavier sigh. The way he took care of problems was so swift. At that rate, he would settle everything within a month's time.

Thirteen region lords wasn't something to laugh about. Individually, their territories were small, but all together, they added up to a big part of the Northern territory. However, Duke Taran's knights were not some everyday normal talents. They had been fighting against the borderland barbarians for years, and they had all grown stronger exponentially during all that time. They all held a lot of real life experience, and their killing skills were of another level. Additionally, Duke Taran personally trained with the knights every day; there was no way they could relax for even a moment.

The duke and the knights had been crisscrossing the wide Northern territory, dealing with the murderous borderland barbarians. By now, they were nothing but killing machines. To these knights, such situations were like jumping into a fight against a flock of sheep.

A knight entered the hall with quick steps to relay information to the chief knight. Chief knight Elliott passed on the information to the duke.

"They've caught him."

"Bring him here." (Hugo)

Several knights communicated with each other through nods and left the hall. In a short while, two knights came in while dragging a man and restraining his arms at the same time. The man was a mess himself, but as soon as he saw the chaos within the halls, he started to scream. Just then, a knight struck the man behind his neck, causing him to tumble onto the floor.

"Waaah!"

The man crawled on the floor while spastically wailing. The duke wasn't so kind-hearted to let the man continue crying. He was about to kick him, but stopped when the crying man started laughing.

"PWAHAHA!!"

Was he crazy? But the man's eyes belonged to a sane person.

“Shut up. Before I decide to snap your neck.”

The duke’s quiet but murderous threat put a stop to the man’s laugh, who breathed roughly trying to calm himself down. He kneeled and slammed his forehead on the floor.

“Please kill me.”

That was a first. The first time someone didn’t beg for their life.

“What?” (Hugo)

Fabian understood the duke was questioning the man and intervened.

“He’s the son of Count Brown’s previous wife. It’s been just over one year since it was decided he would succeed his father, but it seems they set this up so he would become a sacrificial lamb in case their plan failed.”

“The others didn’t prepare something like that.” (Hugo)

“Count Brown was always detailed in everything he did.” (Fabian)

“Leave that man in charge of this place.” (Hugo)

“Really?”

Fabian rejoiced.

“Please kill me! Your Grace!”

The duke had said he would save the man and leave the region to him, but he was still going on about dying. Fabian glared at him, wondering whether the man had really gone insane. He was relieved that his workload had decreased, but it seemed he had rejoiced too soon.

“Why?”

“I loathe the blood... flowing inside this body of mine.”

The man was looking at his own two hands with disgust, while the duke watched on

with a blank look. A crooked smile formed on Hugo's lips.

"You hate the blood inside your veins, yet you cannot kill yourself. Then you must live on while bearing that pain."

Just like how he couldn't discard the blood ties inside himself.

The man looked up at Hugo with shocked eyes. Hugo turned his back to the man.

*"My name is Hue. In my language, it means demon, devil, something of that sort."*

*"Hugh? Woah. We look the same and even have similar names! My name is Hugo."*

*"Not Hugh, Hue. Idiot."*

*"Hue, Hue, Hugh. If you say it fast it's all the same. Hugh. Your name is Hugh."*

*"....."*

*"I thought I was all alone up until now. But now we are not alone anymore. Right, Hugh?"*

*"Idiot. Your brain is so bright that it burned up. Don't you understand what our old man is going to do? Whether it is you or me, one of us will be killed."*

*"I will protect you."*

*"You groveling bastard."*

*"You can protect me too."*

Recalling his past, his cold-blooded heart still hurt as though needles were stabbing through it.

*"This is for your own good, Hugh. I love you my brother(1)."*

Hugo wanted to say one thing to his brother, who had already left this world.

'You are wrong.'

If it was for his own good, his older brother should have stabbed him dead with his



sword. His older brother had thrown him away to this pathetic and dirty world.

‘I need alcohol.’

Even so, he couldn’t get drunk. Even if he drank all the alcohol in the world, he wouldn’t get drunk. No matter how much he enjoyed alcohol, girls, and killing, he couldn’t get drunk off them. The Taran family’s bloodline was terrible like that. Thus, he was a monster.

No matter how much he bathed in the blood of others, he could instantly change himself into an honorable noble. Those two identities reflected his true self.

‘I’m tired.’

The world he lived in... was too tiresome.



Lucia went to explore the sights of Roam in her spare time. There wasn’t a place Lucia was restricted from visiting. Many structures were built surrounding the high central tower, while tall inner walls encircled the whole place. If one looked to the east, south, north, and west, one could locate four more towering structures. When one climbed to the top of those towers, one could see all of Roam with a bird’s eye view.

However, she was restricted from visiting the west tower. The west tower’s door was tightly locked. She had visited the place many times before, but it had remained locked, so she decided to ask the maids who were following her.

“Why is this place locked? Bring me the keys.”

“Madam, it would be better if you did not enter this place.”

“Why?”

The maids answered with extreme discomfort.

“It is haunted by ghosts.”

The maid shivered like she was explaining an unspeakable tale, while Lucia snickered a few moments later.

“Ghost? Did anyone see it?”

The maid went on with a passionate speech about all the people who had witnessed the horrifying ghost, bringing up even a friend’s friend’s story, along with the tales that a distant relative had relayed to her. Still, that meant that she had not seen the ghost personally, and the person who had seen the ghost was nobody very close to her either. It was a random rumor that she had picked up by chance.

“Then why does the ghost appear here? There should be a reason, right?”

“...I’m not sure of the exact reason either. But everyone says ghosts appear here.”

Lucia continued to ask the maid different questions on the topic and found out that most citizens of Roam knew of the story. If the story had spread to that degree, it wasn’t just a simple rumor, but there had to be another underlying reason. Lucia instantly thought of a person who could quench that curiosity of hers.



“Jerome, I have something to ask you.”

The words ‘I have something to ask you’ were the ones that made Jerome cower in fear the most. His heart sank heavily, and cold sweat dripped from his face.

“Yes, Madam. Please speak.”

“It’s about the west tower. I saw that you’ve locked the place. Everyone says a ghost is haunting it. Does a ghost really dwell there?”

Jerome swallowed hard. As expected of Her Grace, she didn’t ask any ordinary questions.

“...There are such rumors, but I’ve never seen a ghost in my life.”

“That means you’ve been inside the tower before?”

“Yes. However, people kept spreading rumors that whoever enters it faces bad luck. So we decided to restrict people from entering altogether.”

“There should be a reason. Why does the rumor continue to this day?”

“...That is because someone has died in that place before.”

“It wasn’t... an ordinary accident, was it?”

“Yes. Someone was murdered.”

“Oh my.”

She let out a sad sigh with her mouth, but her eyes were glittering.

“Who, why, and how? How could someone be murdered within the castle walls? It must not have been an ordinary murder case.”

*Hhaa.* Jerome let out a heavy sigh. He was contemplating whether it was something he should truthfully relay to Her Grace.

But in the end, he decided it was something the lady of the house should know of. In Jerome’s mind, Lucia was already the perfect Taran family’s duchess.

“It was a case before I was hired as the butler of the castle, so all my knowledge is second-hand as well. The people who died in the west tower were the previous Taran Duke and Duchess.”

Lucia inquired about the topic with a light heart as if she was reading a mystery novel, however upon his words, her face stiffened.

“...Heavens. No... why?”

“This is part of the secret history of Duke Taran. It happened long ago and not many people know of it. However, I thought Madam should know of this.”

There had been a long investigation. Lucia tensely listened.

“I’ve told you before that His Grace had a twin brother.”

“I remember.”

“The previous duke feared that his children would fight in order to succeed after him. Therefore, he made a cruel decision. He decided to let one of his sons succeed him and abandon his other son. I’m not sure whether the duke decided to kill his own child.

However, the child that was thrown away matured and appeared before the ducal couple, then ended their lives with his own hands.”

‘Oh my god.’ The shocking truth of the Taran family’s secret history began to sink in, making her hands tremble.

“At the time, His Grace was not in Roam and was able to escape death. I wasn’t present at the castle then, so I’m not too sure of the exact details of this case, either. “

To have experienced something so painful. She had assumed that he had never experienced anything painful in his life.

“Then... his twin brother... killed his own parents?”

“The previous duke was indeed the father, but the duchess was not his mother. I heard that their mother died giving birth to them.”

It was grotesque that a child would kill his own father, but she felt a bit of relief that he had not killed his own mother. Maybe it was because of her own personal experiences. Lucia’s father was someone who didn’t deserve even her disdain, but her mother was all the love she’d had in this world.

“He is a very... strong person. I cannot even begin to fathom that he has experienced something so cruel...”

“Yes, His Grace is a very strong person.”

Lucia felt a little sad as she understood where his strength might have originated from. She wished to tightly hug him at this moment. Maybe he didn’t give any attention to his past anymore. As a result, her own feelings could become an annoyance to him. However, she wished to help console him in some way. He could be a bit selfish and say some hurtful things, but at this moment, she thought she could forgive him for anything.

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#### Footnotes:

(1) *I love you my brother*: The literal translation is “I love you my little brother, my older brother.” They are twins, thus this phrase. But I don’t think it makes that much sense to a lot of people. To reduce confusion, I’ve reworded it.

# Chapter 13

## The Ducal Couple (1)

Raindrops pattered onto the window. Her heart felt at peace as she enjoyed the tea scent that filled the drawing room. She was enjoying her afternoon tea time. Rather than her personal drawing room on the second floor, she preferred the one on the first floor.

She was sitting in the spacious and quiet room all alone as if time had stopped.

‘Has it been... a month now...?’

A month had passed since their wedding. Of that month, three weeks had been spent living alone in Duke Taran’s castle located in Roam. She had not heard any sort of news of him ever since he had taken off on his own at the capital.

“Madam. Is there anything you’d like to eat for dinner today?”

“Anything is fine.”

Every day he’d ask the same question and she’d answer in the same way. Lucia had never eaten a meal more sumptuous and luxurious than the food served here.

Jerome watched Lucia eat crackers with gentle eyes. At first, he’d been worried that a princess was going to become the duke’s lady of the house. He had worried over how he’d serve such a fussy and capricious noblewoman; the hysteria she’d throw after being neglected by her husband; his head had been aching as he’d imagined the days ahead.

However, he’d long thrown away those worries during their travels here to Roam. Even the knights had praised that it was a first time they had met a noblewoman so easy to escort.

The duchess never even did the things that the mere mistresses of the duke had been trying to do. She didn’t unnecessarily go out of her way to oppress all the employees staffed under her to set up a hierarchy. She didn’t bother with petty power struggles

with Jerome either. She let the people around her do their job, while she lived her own life. Not once did she raise her voice at another.

She was gentle-mannered and tender-hearted. Jerome truly felt happy from the bottom of his heart.

Booong...

The sound of a heavy trumpet sounded. Lucia looked at Jerome with a startled heart. When she saw Jerome's tense expression, it made her fear double. Jerome was usually very relaxed and calm, so seeing him like that caused her a lot of anxiety.

"His Grace has returned."

Her heart started to race.

"Madam, there is no need for you to go out to greet his Grace."

Lucia was about to get up from her seat, but she sat herself back down with an awkward movement.

"I'm not trying to convey any sort of message to you. I'm just taking precaution in case Madam gets scared."

"Scared...?"

"I am unable to tell Madam in great detail, however the task His Grace had tackled was perilous. At times like these, His Grace becomes very sensitive. He always bathes before doing anything; it will be better for you to meet His Grace afterwards."

Lucia nodded and saw the butler out. She didn't know the exact reason he had to be away for so long or what kind of problems the north was facing. She was nosy with the small details of the castle, but she didn't try to interfere into his business at all. She had only picked up bits of information when she occasionally happened to overhear some of the conversations between the knights guarding the castle.

*"You can say they're dead..."*

*"The Lord Duke... forgive..."*

She had been too far away to hear all of their conversations, but she could put together that the duke's task had to do with killing others.

'Could it be related to the borderland barbarians?'

Any person from Xenon knew that the North was always at war with the borderland barbarians. Everyone agreed that the reason the northern citizens lived in peace was because Duke Taran was keeping all the dangers at bay.

If the small-scale battles with the borderland barbarians escalated... It could be considered a type of war as well.

She thought something like a war wouldn't affect her life at all. The war had ended not too long ago, but Xenon had only participated in it and the citizens had not experienced the aftereffects of it at all. At this moment, she realized that the North had always been in a state of war.

'Why did I come to this place?'

Lucia's husband, Duke Hugo Taran, was known as the wartime's black lion. He'd killed countless people and was infamous for it.



Hugo took care of all the problems in his own stubborn way within a month. As for the problems pertaining to the many lawless lands that had sprung due to the shortage of administration employees, Hugo didn't fuss about the problem.

He had originally planned to tour the North anyway. But in order for that to happen, it would take at least half a year. Rather than taking such a long trip, he decided to return home. He hadn't taken a break regardless of whether it was raining or storming. He made a grand entrance in Roam with his clothes smelling of rotten water and dust covering his whole body.

"I'm happy to see that you're in great health, Your Grace."

The employees of the castle stood in a line, while Jerome politely greeted the Lord Duke. From just his appearance, it felt like the duke would cut down anyone who came near him. His bloodthirsty aura had not disappeared yet, and it felt as if one could still

hear the screams of those he had killed.

‘No matter how many times I see him like this, I can’t get used to it.’

Jerome felt a sense of incompatibility whenever he saw his Lord Duke like that. Jerome had always remained in the castle and taken care of the business of their estate; he had never seen Duke Taran in action as a knight.

The duke within Jerome’s mind was a perfect being without a speck of flaw. The duke had always been an upright person all along. The duke never got mad nor yelled. He would execute his tasks at the appointed time every day. Thus, whenever Jerome saw the duke like this, he couldn’t help but become nervous.

“I’ve prepared the bath water in advance.”

A hot bath, and a relaxing cup of tea. That was all that was needed for his Lord Duke to return to normal.

“Has anything happened while I was gone?”

Jerome, who was sensible, was able to understand his master’s true question. His Lord Duke had never asked such a vague question to him upon his return before.

“There is nothing of importance. Her Grace is also at peace and healthy. I’ve informed Madam that there was no need to come out and greet you personally on your return.”

“You’ve done well.”

He turned his back.

“Gather for a meeting in an hour. Everyone must be present. There are no excuses.”

As he disappeared off to bathe, Jerome answered to his back figure, then glanced to the drawing room Lucia was waiting in. The meeting wouldn’t end in just a few hours. It would have been better if he could share a few words of greeting with her before the meeting.

‘The enemy troops aren’t at our front doors, and it wouldn’t hurt to push the meeting back a bit.’



As soon as the ducal couple's informal wedding had been complete, she had been dragged to their territory and almost imprisoned in the castle. To make it worse, he had not sent a single letter of his well-being for the whole month. Anyone would criticize that crude behavior and treatment. But still, he had asked about the Madam's well-being when he arrived, and that counted for something. Jerome had served the duke for many years and he understood that this signified something very big.

'It seems I haven't assumed things incorrectly.'

*"This is the Taran's Lady of the House. Give all your respects to her."*

Jerome had conjectured the duke's few words as a warning.

*"If you don't know your own place, everyone will die."*

Jerome had no intentions to ignore the duke's warnings. Whenever he got the chance, he made sure to educate the employees on that fact. Thankfully, Jerome guessed the duke's meaning correctly. Jerome didn't do his job just because it was his duty, but he felt honest respect for the Taran's lady of the house.

'Would Fabian be in the capital about now...?'

Although it was just a small conflict within a territory, all those people were the Emperor's people. Too many people had died. Fabian was entrusted with the duty to inform the Emperor of the conflict and to negotiate how everything would be smoothed over. Fabian had sent a short message to Jerome before he'd left for the capital.

*– That person thinks too lightly of a human's life.*

The short sentence was enough to relay Fabian's anguish. Jerome could perfectly understand his feelings and felt a little apologetic. Different from Jerome, Fabian followed the duke to every battle as the adjutant general and had seen his Lord Duke take countless lives. It couldn't be helped that there was a big gap between how the two of them viewed their Lord Duke; one had seen the killings in person, and the other had not.

Fabian agreed with the many others who called his Lord Duke a 'tyrant'. On the surface, they berated the ones who spoke such careless remarks, but on the inside, they believed the same thing. If he didn't suppress and exploit others, he wouldn't be called

a tyrant. He did as he pleased, and nobody could object to his actions; he was the very definition of a tyrant.

Jerome had witnessed it during the duke's marriage. The marriage had been abrupt and without celebration, but even so, nobody had spoken a word of discontent. Everyone had looked to Jerome to try and understand the duke's true intentions behind the marriage.

Jerome truly had no idea either. Fabian seemed to know some things, but Jerome hadn't tried to dig deeper into it. The two of them were brothers and they kept their private and public lives separate.

'It would be nice if this marriage has a bit of meaning to him...'

If the Lord Duke's temper could die down even just a bit, they would have no other wishes.



The quiet echo of clattering utensils could be heard in the dining room. Lucia placed a small piece of steak into her mouth and enjoyed the tender premium meat.

The first time she had tried the steak, she had been so deeply moved that she had felt sad whenever she'd had to swallow each bite. She had eaten that dish only a few times, but any of the emotions she had first felt when she enjoyed it were nowhere to be found. Inside her head, she agreed it was the best dish, but she could not feel the same inside her heart. Her sense of taste was quite fickle.

Lucia sat on a table long enough to generously seat 20 adults. The duke had returned, but Lucia was left to enjoy her meals alone. Other than Lucia, the only people present were the maids and servants on standby next to her.

He had returned this afternoon, and while the late evening had descended, she had not seen his face once. As soon as he had finished his bath, he had gathered his subordinates in his study to hold a meeting. The meeting didn't show any signs of ending soon, either.

It seemed the people inside had no thoughts of having dinner, because the maids kept working hard, bringing in tea and sandwiches into the study. She was originally going

to wait and enjoy dinner together with him, but the butler had suggested it would be better to eat first, and she'd had no choice but to have a late dinner all by herself.

'He's a very busy man...'

She didn't expect a lovey-dovey married life with him, however since they'd be living in the same house, she thought they could live peacefully while sharing a few words every now and then. It seemed even that was just a delusion of hers.

They lived in the same house, but their living spaces were completely separate. There would be no accidental meeting without one person intentionally seeking the other out.

'It would have been nice if his family were still alive.'

Whether it was his mother or his brother, she could have worked to become friendlier with them while living out the rest of her days. She felt sad for the tragic death of his family. At the same time, she wished to meet his son, who was living alone in a boarding school.

Thankfully, she wasn't one to easily fall in depression. She had a fairly independent personality. She accomplished her tasks and settled her own problems most of the time. But this dull lifestyle was becoming quite tedious.

All her life, she had kept herself busy. However, this place was too luxurious, to the point that there was nothing for her to do.

She had barely finished half her steak, but she didn't have much of an appetite. It was such a waste, but eating more would only cause her to feel nauseous and sick.

'Should I just finish the whole plate and suffer later?'

She contemplated for a bit, then put down her knife.

"Does it not suit your taste?"

"That's not it. Please relay to the chef that the dish was great as usual. Today... I just feel a bit full. I think I ate too many crackers this afternoon."

Lucia usually finished all her afternoon snacks and dinner as well. However, she had

not eaten much of the crackers today at all. Even so, Jerome didn't bother going out of his way to remind Lucia of that fact.

"Is it still raining?"

"Yes, it seems it will be pouring all night long."

"I see."

If it wasn't raining, she could have taken a walk around the lackluster garden. It felt like the day was crawling by today.

"I'll be heading up now."

"Shall I bring some tea for you?"

"Please do. Ah, actually never mind. I'll be in the study. I'll have my tea at a later time."

"Yes, madam."

The one place Lucia loved in Roam was Hugo's study. It had high black domed ceiling. The wall facing south had a giant window that let the sunshine light up the room until sundown. The other walls were covered with books all the way up to the ceiling. The walls had three levels of railing systems with the width of about a single person. One could travel across all the different levels of bookshelves through a set of stairs.

On the left, one could find another room, except it had no door. Inside, there was a sofa and a bed. Toward the right, there was another room which was tightly locked. According to Jerome, the room was filled with various Taran family heirlooms and only the duke was allowed to enter it. Even Jerome himself had never entered the room before.

It was the luxury study of everyone's dreams.

The estate in the capital had a similarly designed study, and they always bought two copies of each book. One copy would stay in Roam, while the other would be carried off to the capital. Had she known there was a study in the capital estate, she would've visited the place. She had spent all her days in bed and had no idea a study existed at all.

“The book I was reading yesterday... Ah, found it.”

Lucia could not work up the courage to bring the books outside the room, so she always politely read inside. She was worried she would stain the pages of the books, so she didn't even dare drink tea.

She hadn't received permission to enter the study. The butler had said it would be alright, so she frequented the place, but she worried a bit in case Hugo would think otherwise.

She engrossed herself in reading while enjoying the smell of old paper. She was almost done with the book. 30 minutes later she turned the last page. Lucia stared at the word 'end' for a while, then slowly closed the book.

'It was pretty good. The middle felt a little slow, but it had a tranquil feeling. I should read more of this author's works.'

Lucia returned the book to its original place and scanned the bookshelf once again. The bookshelf was neatly organized, so it was easy to find the author's other works. Among the many titles, a particular one caught her interest. There was one single problem – the book was very high up. Stretching her hand up, she could barely reach it. It seemed that if she tiptoed, she could get to the book.

'Just a little bit more. A little bit... '

Lucia struggled with all her strength. It was so close yet so far. While she was putting all her effort into getting the book, a shadow appeared from behind her. A long arm smoothly wrapped around her waist and she could feel someone's strong chest against her back. She could smell the scent of a particular person, and suddenly she felt dizzy. The other arm of the person easily reached for the book Lucia was struggling to get all along.

“This one?”

Lucia was startled by the low voice that rang above her head. His low but smooth voice was breathtaking. Lucia reflexively escaped from his embrace as fast as she could. She could identify the person from scent and voice so fast that it surprised her.

'I must have... been waiting. For this man.'

She ate and spent her days in Roam very well. It was to the point that she praised herself for her fast adaptability. Thus, she had assumed she didn't have him in her mind. She didn't think she missed or yearned for him at all.

But the moment Lucia saw him, her heart was singing. It was as if her heart was surging with overwhelming emotions and thumping so loudly that she worried whether he was able to hear it beating.

"Thank... you."

She received the book and took a step back. She acted as if she got burned, causing him to look at Lucia with displeasure. He had only wrapped his hand around her waist. It felt like he could still feel her soft body, so he tightly gripped his hand into a fist.

'Is the meeting over? Maybe they are taking a short break. Should I be asking if he had a safe trip? How do I start this conversation...?'

Dozens of thoughts swam around in circles in her mind. In the end, she could not work up the courage to say anything.

"I'm sorry for greeting you so late after my return."

When he started the conversation, Lucia felt the suffocating feeling lift from her body.

"That's to be expected with the amount of work you have. Is the meeting... over?"

"For today it is."

"The cas-castle is stunning. It's so gigantic it took me more than a day to tour the whole place."

"When you've lived here a while, you will realize you frequent only a few rooms necessary for daily life."

"Ah... yes. I'm sure it's so."

"I heard you had trouble finishing your dinner."

"I ate a lot. Though... of course I won't have a huge appetite every single day of my life."

“Today, you didn’t have much of an appetite?”

“Huh? Ah... not really...”

“Was it not delicious?”

“The chef’s skills are top-notch.”

“Is anyone being disagreeable with you?”

“Everyone is really really friendly. Everyone.”

He had asked in a slow tone, but Lucia answered with a scary fast speed. By chance, if the meal really tasted a little off or if someone happened to be unfriendly, it felt like this wasn’t the right time to become a blabbermouth. In any case, the meals were top quality and everyone in Roam was friendly.

He inched closer slowly. Lucia hesitated while taking small steps back, but soon her back hit the bookshelf behind her. He drew close to her, resting one hand on the bookshelf and trapping her from moving, as his other hand gently combed through her hair.

Her heart started thumping so wildly it hurt. The moment they had shared a month ago vividly played in her mind. His overwhelming strength and his heavy body that repeatedly entered hers; as well as the sharp pain that had caused her to break out in cold sweat. She felt like she had turned into an obscene woman, making her flustered.

“Look at me.”

Lucia carefully lifted her head, returning her attention from the intriguing floor and surroundings back to Hugo. She had to look up quite a bit to meet his gaze; he towered over her.

“Are you uncomfortable when you’re with me?”

“...I’m not uncomfortable, just a little flustered.”

“Why?”

“I... still feel awkward, but it doesn’t seem to be the case for Your Grace. It has been an

entire month since I've last seen you..."

"Are you nagging me for returning a month later?"

"How can I...?"

The end of his lips stretched into a smile. His mysterious appearance caused Lucia's heart to thump. His long finger lightly raised her chin up. He slightly bowed to meet her eyes up close. When his lips touched hers, Lucia's heart felt like it was being squeezed tight to the point it would malfunction, so she closed her eyes.

He lightly bit her lower lip, the shock making her lips slightly open. He quickly took the opportunity to venture his own tongue into her mouth. His warm flesh smoothly brushed against her gums and tickled the roof of her mouth. The sensation of their tangling tongues made her body hum.

He supported the back of Lucia's head with his hand and deepened their kiss. The sound of their lips and saliva smacking grew louder, making Lucia's face flushed. Her hands, that had been wandering, had unknowingly wrapped around his neck somehow. Upon this, he firmly wrapped his arm around her hips and hugged her close against him.

After a long while, he parted his mouth from hers. Lucia took heavy gasps as if she had gone for a run. She wasn't sure whether her body was exhausted or she was mentally drunk from the atmosphere till it made her breathless.

Half her senses were already gone off to somewhere, but when he bit onto her neck, her senses returned like a slap. When she collected herself again, one of his leg was in between hers, while their bodies were flush against each other. His arms were also firmly wrapped around her hips.

She had dropped the book long ago, letting it flop onto the floor. His scarlet eyes were a hair's breadth away and seemed calm like usual, but at the same time, Lucia could see something burning behind them.

Suddenly, the ceiling spun. He had hoisted her up onto his arms and was briskly walking off to somewhere. He walked into the adjacent room connected to the study and laid her onto the bed. She watched him climb on top of her in a daze and belatedly realized what his true intentions were. He was going to embrace her. Right now, right here.



“Wait... wait!”

In that short moment, he had already stripped Lucia’s breasts naked. When she felt the cold air on her skin, she realized an even more terrifying fact.

‘I don’t like pain!’

She was scared. Lucia quickly crossed her arms and covered her breasts.

“Let... let’s wash first.”

Lucia blurted out a random excuse, but when she thought deeper on it, it should sound very agreeable.

“I’ve already had a bath.”

“I mean me. Me!”

“I don’t care about that.”

“I care! Your Grace... Hugh. Please...”

In the morning, she had washed only her face. It was raining and the weather was so dreary that her body felt tired as well. She was scared, but putting her fear aside, she didn’t want to roll around in bed in such a dreary state.

His eyebrows lifted as he obediently moved away from her. He even assisted her up by holding her hand. Lucia re-fastened her clothes as fast as she could and escaped out of the study as fast as a flying arrow. She’d had her neck bitten by a wolf and had barely made her escape. Hugo watched her running away like a rabbit and let out a forced laugh.

He had barely managed to restrain his surging lust. He thought of her tear-filled pumpkin colored eyes and the desires he’d managed to hold back flared up again.

Anyway, she had nowhere to escape to. She could only attempt things within Roam. She was his wife after all.

Wife.

Hugo liked the word for some reason. He was even happier with the fact that this word – ‘wife’ – was attached to her.

Hugo ran his hand through his hair. He did it unconsciously whenever things didn’t go his way.

He felt chaotic. He wanted to embrace her. He wanted to thrust himself deeply into her tight body. Whenever he remembered the hot and moist feeling of being inside her, his lower half got painfully rigid. He was lusting for her. That was an undeniable fact. However, he didn’t understand the clear reason behind it.

She wasn’t a stunning beauty. She wasn’t an expert in bed either. On their first night, she had been trembling from nerves, and because of the pain, she had struggled through the whole process. Whenever he touched her body, she would flinch like something bad was going to happen. He couldn’t satisfy his desires to his heart’s content, either.

Even so, her body felt mind-numbingly good. The pressure and heat of her insides came to him in waves, and the euphoria was enough to make him lose his mind. When he saw her try to follow his actions, it had snapped his last bit of sanity.

He never let his bedtime activities affect his regular life. No matter how hot and passionate the sex, once he stepped out of bed, he was able to erase it all from his mind. But after that night, she kept appearing inside his mind and bothering him endlessly.

Her gasping moans, how she would grasp his shoulders tighter whenever he thrust in, her tight insides, and her tear-filled eyes. His lower half throbbed whenever he looked at the teeth marks she had left on his arm.

If Hugo were to compare the satisfaction level of sex and killing, the two gave him equal amounts of pleasure. His blood thirsted for the blood of others. He couldn’t go around killing people all year round, so in his free time, he had turned to quell his body’s heat by embracing women. Therefore, when he was out killing, he didn’t need a woman’s body to satisfy himself.

This time, however, was different. Every night, he couldn’t stop the floating images of her in his mind, and his lower half throbbed like crazy. Even so, he didn’t wish to quench his sexual frustration by venting out on a random female. That was why he

had canceled his tour around the northern territory and had returned home instead. The entire month, his body had felt like it was on fire.

He had to confirm whether her body was really that sweet. Maybe he was just regretting that their moment had passed too quickly. If it was the latter, all he needed to do was take care of that regret. If it was the former, it would become a huge problem for him.

No matter how much he yearned for a female's body, his heart had never been shaken up to that degree. He didn't like the fact that he could be shaken up by anything at all.

He got up from the bed and entered the study once more. He picked up the fallen book and went to put it back in the shelf, but paused and instead placed it on top of a table. It seemed like she wanted to read it; she would probably look for it again.

*'She is... in the study room.'*

Jerome had answered in a hesitant manner. It was strictly forbidden for anyone to enter the study without permission. The study was designed as a place that could be cut off from the outside world; it was his only private space within the whole castle. From time to time, he needed a place where he could just breathe while being alone. He didn't spend that much time in the study, but if he ever decided to go there, it meant he didn't want to be bothered unless it was a very urgent matter.

When he'd heard that she was in the study, he hadn't felt irritated. Rather, he had personally carried her to the bed in order to seduce her. Something he would have never imagined before getting married.

But to be precise, accepting a marriage proposal like that wasn't his style. From that point on, things had continued to tangle in weird directions. He couldn't decide whether he was happy or irritated, making him feel confused.

Someone knocked on the door.

"Your Grace, it's Jerome," Jerome politely spoke.

"Come in."

As soon as Jerome entered, he checked His Lord Duke's expression. He had witnessed the madam run out of the study and into her bedroom. Jerome had mentioned to her

that the maids had already readied the bath for her. He noticed the madam's face was stiff and made speculations about the situation.

Jerome had been keeping track of the madam's every action. He wasn't trying to surveil her; he simply wished to care for her in the best way he could provide. It didn't seem like the madam had grown completely comfortable of the place, so he was going to keep caring for her that way for a while longer. His rank was only the head butler and he didn't want to overstep his boundaries.

Jerome didn't usually go out of his way to eat more than he could chew; he didn't throw his body around wastefully for the sake of loyalty, either. He always did his job the best he could, but he never increased that effort to over 100 percent. Even so, the reason for his sudden drastic change in behavior was because he was very satisfied with the current lady of the house. He had a bloodhound's instinct – she would not break the peace of the duke's life.

Ever since Duke Taran took in a wife, the once dreary castle seemed to be bursting with new-found energy, and it made Jerome happy. They had hired a lot of new maids for the madam's sake, which contributed a lot.

The castle, that was once filled with only men, was now lively with many young women. The rigid and scary faces of the subordinates had softened dramatically. Jerome had already caught many of the servants dating, but he was turning a blind eye to it.

"Your Grace. It was me who said it would be alright for Madam to enter the study. If I had overstepped my boundaries..."

"What is your opinion of the duchess as the lady of the house?"

The duke didn't pay any mind to his apology and instead threw a random question. Even so, Jerome did not become bewildered. The duke wasn't such a kind person as to spell out every single detail to the opposite party.

"I dare not judge Her Grace, however, everyone loves the Madam."

"Everyone?"

The duke chuckled as if conveying, 'Isn't that only your opinion?'

Jerome had started confessing his faults even though he wasn't being interrogated in the first place. He was worried whether his own mistake might carry over anger to her. It had also been Jerome to catch the Duke as soon as the meeting was over and reveal that the Madam's appetite had not been well the whole day.

When the duke heard the news, he had felt a little worried and apologetic toward her. Thus, he had decided to push the last minute details of the meeting for later and had gone to the study to meet her.

Jerome's competence as a butler derived from his style of nipping problems in the bud with accuracy. Thus, he felt weird. Jerome understood that a woman didn't earn the duke's affection just by being his lover. Rather, the duke caused never ending pain for all the noble ladies he had made ties with.

All of the duke's exes hated Jerome without exception. One particular woman had thrown juice in Jerome's face. Many women slandered Jerome to Hugo's ears. Of course, the party that would be cut off was not Jerome, but the woman.

"Why?"

"She has more than enough dignity to fulfil a Duchess' duties. She doesn't abuse her subordinates. She has a clear line of what she expects and disapproves of, but she never makes trouble over nothing. But on the other hand, she doesn't become unnecessarily friendly with the maids. There are no chances for maids to become full of themselves over favoritism."

"Is that so...?"

That had been unexpected. It felt like she wouldn't be able to express anything other than a warm kind heart. She was so young, yet she had such skill controlling people beneath her. If that was not the case, Jerome would not be praising her to this degree.

"What is she doing now?"

At this rate, Jerome would start singing an anthem dedicated to Her Grace. So he quickly put a stop to his words.

"She is bathing."

Hugo's lips curved up, very satisfied. Hugo's reaction had been instant, different from

the sluggish fake front he usually displayed toward others.

“Madam has requested for tea to be brought up to her room. I shall bring tea for the both of you.”

Jerome suggested for the both of them to share a cup of tea while enjoying a peaceful evening. But he had not accurately guessed the Lord Duke’s true intentions this time. The thing the Lord Duke wished for was not tea.

“Don’t bring it up.”

Jerome’s lips stiffened.

“Don’t bother us.”

Jerome’s stiff expression softened and bowed.

“Don’t come in to wake us up in the morning, either.”

“I will heed to your commands.”

# Chapter 14

## The Ducal Couple (2)

Lucia gazed at the floating red flower petals on the water surface. Gradually, her face reflected the same red hue. The maids were softly pouring the bath water over Lucia's shoulders; every time they splashed a bit of water, a fragrant aroma gently spread.

Lucia had never ordered anyone to prepare the bath like that. It was all the sneaky maids' ideas. The purpose of this bath seemed so obvious that it made her embarrassed. However, it was more embarrassing because she really had such a purpose.

"Madam, how can your skin be so smooth?"

"Your skin is so silky even without applying oil."

"A baby's skin will not be able to compare to yours."

The maids kept chattering without stop today. They seemed to be in a happy mood for the ducal couple's first night together in Roam. Lucia listened to the maids' flattery without much of a reaction. She also knew her own skin was very nice. But she didn't feel particularly proud about it.

'Regardless, men are only attracted by a pretty face and a glamorous body, not nice skin. He... probably thinks the same.'

Duke Taran of her dream had gone around spreading scandals with various women. Every time one greeted him at a party, he would have a different woman hanging on his arm. However, the point that connected all the females together was that they all had huge breasts.

Lucia snuck a quick glance at her own breasts and let out a small sigh. There was no way she could try and claim she had big breasts. At least she had a slim waist line that helped to accentuate her hips, so she didn't look completely flat. Even so, she thought it wasn't anything worth showing off. Her face wasn't particularly pretty either.

In order to catch his eye, one had to have at least Sofia Lawrence's level of beauty. Lucia recalled the events from the victory ball. A beauty like Sofia had been thrown away without a second thought.

All of Duke Taran's flings were beauties that seemed like roses. Although he went around switching partners left and right, it did not tarnish his reputation. After his marriage, he had not made appearances with any woman other than his wife.

Inside her dream, the duke at least had a level of respect to his own wife. Therefore, she felt relieved because it meant that in this life she would be able to have the same level of respect from the duke.

After her bath, she entered her bedroom in her gown, but she was extremely startled. He was sitting by the table with some wine. He was about to take a sip, but instead he turned his attention to Lucia and slowly got up.

The maids, who had been waiting on the duke, became flustered as they watched the two of them and quickly escaped from the room. Tomorrow, the servants of the castle would all be gossiping about this: The duke couldn't even wait for the duchess to finish her bath and had decided to wait in her room.

Lucia let out a heavy sigh. He had let her have a peaceful bath to ready her heart. But that did not reduce her fears. The first night they had shared had been too sudden and intense. She couldn't claim that she hated the entire process, but it hurt a lot and was tiresome.

Even with those feelings, she could not look away from him. The memories of their first night were hazy, but they suddenly returned with extreme clarity. She walked closer to him like she was possessed.

He poured a glass of wine and lifted it to her as if asking if she wanted some. He wore a thin see-through linen shirt that showed off his muscles. Lucia gulped down thickly and nodded.

She sipped a small amount of wine. It had a bitter sour taste. She wasn't particularly fond of the taste, but she chugged the whole glass clean and pushed it back to him.

"More?"

When she nodded, one side of his lips quirked up, and he refilled the wine glass while



chuckling softly. After drinking, her body warmed up and her heart relaxed. He was admiring her flushed cheeks when she licked the wine residue from her lips. His eyes grew a degree darker.

He reached for her without warning. His hand supported the back of her head as he sucked on her red lips. Taking the wine glass from her hand, he gently placed it back on the table and wrapped his arm around her waist.

He lightly sucked on her lips to loosen her tense muscles, then used his tongue to deepen the kiss. He could taste the bittersweet flavor of the wine. He brushed his tongue against her gums and pulled away while maintaining eye contact with her. He wanted to see her tear stained eyes again.

“Do you enjoy alcohol?” (Hugo)

“...Only on special occasions.” (Lucia)

He chuckled in satisfaction and started kissing her once more. His mouth stimulated her in a sweet and gentle way, so that Lucia had to lean against him for support due to her weakening body.

He slid his hands beneath her disheveled gown. One hand stroked her hip, while the other one reached up and squeezed her breast. His touch sent shocking jolts throughout her body. His leg had snuck in between hers and was rubbing against her body. With his lips pressed against her neck, he let out a low whisper.

“You’re shaking.”

Upon his words, Lucia realized that she was trembling. The drunk feeling from earlier was already gone.

“Don’t be scared. It won’t hurt this time. If you remain so tense, you won’t be able to enjoy it and you might get hurt again.”

When her trembling continued, Hugo embraced her tightly with a rigid face. She was small and weak, but confident and steadfast. If a person like her feared him to such a degree, he had to be a heinous bad guy.

She was young and a virgin. He realized himself that their first night together had been rough. She would have felt nervous even if he had treated her gently, but he had treated

her like all of his past one night stands. It must have been a strenuous experience for her.

She already had a long list of opinions of him, but now it would be one item longer. He was sure it wouldn't be a positive trait either.

'Damn it. I should have held myself back before.' He regretted too late.

He didn't want to force himself on her when she was trembling in fright. He wanted to enjoy a passionate night together with her. All his past lovers had been women who enjoyed being intimate. In Lucia's case, it was her first time and he wasn't sure how he should continue forward. For the first time he wanted to seduce a woman who didn't know how to enjoy sex.

Hugo held her up and walked to their bed. She didn't reject him, but her hands and arms were tense from nerves.

He laid her on the bed and lied down next to her. He embraced her hips and cuddled. His hand gently slid down her back, but he didn't try to take his actions further.

A long while passed and Lucia was able to relax, but at the same time, she felt a little sad. It seemed like he wasn't thinking of doing similar things as their first night together. He was probably here to put on a show for all the subordinates – that they were happy together. He was probably doing it for her sake.

The lady of the house's position became crystallized once she obtained her husband's love. If so, what was the meaning behind what had happened between them at Hugo's personal study. If she hadn't rejected him at that time, would that have changed anything? Too many complicated thoughts swam around in her mind.

"Are you sleeping?" (Hugo)

"..."

"Hey. Are you really sleeping? I'm not doing this to put you to sleep, you know." (Hugo)

He rolled his body on top of her. Lucia's eyes turned round with shock as she stared back at him. He seemed a little embarrassed and hesitant.

"Are you tired?" (Hugo)

“I’m fine, but... you’re probably tired by now. Upon your return, you’ve been busy with the meeting...”

“I’m fine. That’s not a problem... Anyway, I’m not tired at all.”

“...I see. Um... okay.”

The words, ‘Your stamina is amazing,’ almost left her mouth, but just then, he let out a heavy sigh. He had climbed on top of her, but all she did was stare back with a blank expression; he couldn’t help but feel frustrated. They had already been intimate with one another on their first night; his mysterious girl shouldn’t be ignorant of his intentions.

“I’m dying to be inside of you again.”

“...Huh?”

Lucia’s face flushed scarlet.

“I want to do it. How about you?”

“...”

“If you don’t want to, I won’t force you.”

His words were so sudden that Lucia didn’t know how to respond. He took her silence as rejection and heavily sighed with a lonely expression.

“Let me be honest. You may not like the idea, but I want you right now. Was our first night together that terrifying?”

“...I.I...”

Her throat felt tight. She wasn’t sure whether he was saying this jokingly or honestly. She wondered whether she was hearing his words correctly. She could see earnest desire behind his eyes. So he could look at others in that way, she thought. She was amazed, but at the same time, she wanted to be coy and push him away.

“...I thought you didn’t enjoy our first night together. Isn’t that why... you teased and laughed at me?”

“Laugh? I did? I admit, I teased you. But it was because you were cute. I’m not such a pitiful guy to laugh at women in bed.”

He seemed determined to get his intentions and excuses across to her. At the word ‘cute’ Lucia’s face glowed pink.

“...The next morning... you stopped midway...”

That day, Lucia had been the one who wanted to stop, but she slyly pushed the blame onto him. However, he currently felt a sense of urgency, so he didn’t notice such fine details.

“Hey, you, woman. If I continued that day I would have caused you to become bed-bound for several days. I endured for your sake”

“...I was in a lot of pain.”

Lucia mumbled while sulking. At her words, Hugo wasn’t able to respond.

“I kept bleeding... and the bloody discharge wouldn’t stop, so I had to rest for two whole days.”

Anna had diagnosed that Lucia hadn’t suffered any serious injuries, but her words ‘bloody discharge’ gave out a strongly different nuance. Men understood that women could bleed after their first intercourse, but the fine details were a blur. She wasn’t acting that way just because she wanted to see a reaction from him. The complaint had just come out unknowingly.

Her words affected him greatly. He breathed in and out like he was in great despair, causing his mood to shift.

After a passionate night, all his past lovers would turn aggressive and try to win him over with a fiercer heart. The girls would not be able to look away from his lower body and appreciate him. There was never a case where they would appeal all the sufferings like her. Thus, he had no idea how to go about mending the situation.

His wife’s body was very frail, so he stamped into his mind that she ought to be treated tenderly.

“...How about now. Are you okay?”

“...Yes.”

He let out a relieved sigh. After managing to cross over the high castle walls, he found himself in front of another wall.

“Is that why you don’t want to?”

This man really wanted her. Lucia became a little dumbfounded. He could seduce any woman to sleep with him. If all he needed was a woman’s body, then he wouldn’t be hanging onto her every word like that and trying to explain himself. He could also force himself on her. However, he looked like he would back away if she requested it of him.

“Vivian. I’ll be sure to keep the promise that I made you on our first night together. As long as it’s not your first time, I’ll make sure it becomes a thrilling experience for you.”

Hugo began to gently coax her. All that took up his mind at this moment was how he could embrace the intelligent woman before him.

“I can’t believe you. Last time, you lied to me.”

Her rejection was firm and he couldn’t help but feel helpless.

“Lied? I told you that it would hurt if it was your first time.”

“You said it would hurt just a little. It hurt a lot.”

“Give me a chance to redeem myself. Do you intend to never sleep with me again?”

Although he was requesting nothing but physical intimacy, she felt like a stunning beauty who was being courted. It hadn’t been all bad at that time. She had felt a little bit of joy. She giggled and spoke.

“I’ll decide after today.”

Hugo spaced out for a moment and softly burst into laughter. Her jokes worked well on him. From time to time, she would say something and he would always laugh. Perhaps, her acknowledgement was what gave him such joy.

“You really keep a person hanging.”

It was a first in his entire life- clinging to a woman like this.

He raised his upper body, spread her legs, and propped himself against her. His lower half, that was throbbing with heat, slid closer to Lucia. Lucia's cheeks gradually flushed.

She had just finished her bath, so she hadn't had the chance to wear anything underneath her gown. He hadn't taken off his pants yet, and a giant mound about to explode out could be seen.

The way he quickly threw off his clothes to the floor displayed his urgency. He untied her robe without hesitation, revealing her smooth white skin. That was the exact image in his imagination that had continuously kept him up at night. Her smooth neckline and delicate collarbone, her silky and sweet breasts that tasted like whipped cream, and her slim waistline.

While he was busy admiring her body from head to toe, she was also doing the same. Their first night had been too hectic and she couldn't properly observe his body. He had broad shoulders and chest, and muscular arms that were twice the thickness or hers. She couldn't pick out a single flaw; he looked like a war god. He had a manly air that made women stare with awe.

He laid his hands on her abdomen and slowly slid them up to her breasts and squeezed them. His strength was firm but not rough. He squeezed and let go as if he was expertly massaging them.

The way his fingers moved made her body feel strange, sending a tingling sensation up her spine. His member that was pressed against her kept twitching, as if showing off its presence. Lucia gasped while twisting her body. He lowered his head and took a mouthful of her breast.

"Ah!"

The slight pain when he sucked and licked around her nipple sent a pleasant feeling through her body, so she closed her eyes.

He gently fondled her body, letting Lucia heat up at her own pace. Her insides were now completely wet and slippery, so he slowly entered her. At that moment, Lucia let out a heavy sigh.

“It doesn’t hurt... does it?”

Lucia took deep breaths and answered with a short ‘no’. There was a slight dull ache, but it wasn’t to the point of pain. Compared to her first night, it was much better. Why did women have to suffer so much pain on their first night? Lucia seriously gave that some thought.

“I will start moving slowly. If you’re tired, tell me.”

He slid in slightly deeper with a slow motion. It was strange to have something rubbing inside of her. The ends of her fingertips jolted, while her body felt like it was sinking in. He continued to repeat his movement of pulling out and sliding in a little deeper, until his length seemed to have hit the deepest part of her body.

“Ah!”

A rush of euphoria hit her.

“Does it hurt?”

“N... o...”

She wasn’t hurting. It definitely wasn’t the feeling of pain, but she felt distressed. He pulled out and thrust in all the way.

“Wait... hk...”

“Does it hurt?”

“Yes... a little... something...”

She wished he would stop for a moment and wait for her, but he answered with a low *hmmmn*, and smirked.

“How can that be?”

He pushed into her warm body.

“Uuk!”

He thrust his bursting erection vigorously. She experienced a short moment of pain and intoxication. At the same time, she felt her body on the brink of climax. It was distressing, but at the same time it felt sweet. As her body continued to swallow his, she noticed how much her body was enjoying this moment. When he heard her breath start to become raspy, his member throbbed harder.

He panted roughly as if growling in her ears. He was feeling the same as Lucia, and it caused her body to burn up. Her body answered back to his, as her insides convulsed and squeezed.

“Uhk...”

Hugo felt his sanity leaving as her insides squeezed and pulsated repeatedly, he could barely hang on as he breathed roughly. He hadn’t even cum yet, but he was feeling a high tension of euphoria. It was very different today, because she wasn’t feeling as much pain as during her first time.

It wasn’t that their sex had ended prematurely the first time. Her innocent expressions, her clear eyes, everything combined together as he thrust deeply into her caused him to fall into a black hole of pleasure. He hungered for more pleasure, and thus he continuously pulled out and thrust deeper and deeper.

“Ah!”

Her insides squeezed him tightly, as if they didn’t want him to slip out. He clenched his teeth as he pounded into her. Every time she squeezed around him, he felt a wave of desire growing thicker. He had to hold back, it wasn’t the right time. He wanted to thrust deeper.

The sexual level right now was like a light brunch to him. The first time he discovered the truth of a woman’s body, he had caused four women to pass out from the nightlong love-making. Even then, he had never lost his rationality. After the countless number of women he had slept with, there wasn’t a woman who had caused him to heat up so much like right now.

“Ah! Un! Wait... wait a moment...”

She felt as if someone had taken a hold of her brain and was massaging it. That distant and strange feeling was fearsome to Lucia, so she pounded onto his chest with her two hands trying to push him away. He took this chance to take a hold of her hands and



pin her down while eagerly thrusting into her.

Every time he thrust, a slippery wet sound resounded crazily. Their raspy breaths and her moaning voice were alluring; he felt a flood of euphoria rush down his body as he climaxed. It was mind-blowingly good.

“Haaa...”

Lucia twisted while mewling. Her pupils dilated and her mouth gaped open, and she couldn't stop her voice from moaning. The feeling was indescribable. It was as if her brain and lower half of her body melted into one being and let out a flood of sensual sweetness.

She was out of breath and her body trembled. She felt fear like she was falling into some place, but at the same time, she felt like her body was floating on cloud nine. She wanted to escape, but at the same time, she didn't want the feeling within her body to leave her.

It was as if a strong hailstorm of euphoria had passed through her entire body. She relaxed her grip on his hands, and flopped down next to him. She couldn't move at all. It was taking some time for her body to return to normal. Her hazy senses gradually returned to normal and it was then that she realized he had his head dug into her neck while breathing roughly.

‘Oh my god.’

Hugo lamented. He thought he was going to die. Her insides squeezed and sucked him in such a way he could only gasp. Up until now, he had never had a moment where he didn't have control over his own body like that.

It was like her body was engulfing him. He felt like a fish that had been harpooned – he could only tremble as his whole body convulsed with pleasure. He suddenly grew to understand how a person could undergo coition death.

This time, he had spent quite a bit of time inside her body. It was different than their first time where he had one-sidedly controlled the situation. Even if he was simply inside of her, her insides convulsed and squeezed repeatedly.

He was barely able to calm himself down. He thought he was already trained to remain rational no matter how things turned. He had slept with women that could knock out

several men after a night of sex, but even then, he thought nothing much of it.

It was the first time he felt this way.

He used his arm to straighten up and looked down at her form. She looked completely disheveled as she breathed roughly. He was a man weak to pleasure. His desire for the woman lying below him grew exponentially. She was sweating from the love-making, and he couldn't help but kiss her forehead. He kissed her tear filled eyes, her nose, her chin, her neck, and down to her deepest part of her body.

Lucia's hazy senses gradually sharpened. Her body was cooling down after climaxing, and she couldn't gather the strength to even move a finger. But now that some time had passed, she felt alright again. His light kisses continued across her entire body without rest. He didn't shy away from kissing every part of her body.

Lucia was a bit embarrassed but joyful at the same time. His gentle kisses felt like she was being loved by him. She had experienced a married life in her dream, but she was ignorant of the sexual relations between husband and wife. However, she understood he was satisfied as much as her.

Lucia didn't know how to use techniques to seduce a man. She was naturally defensive and it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say her heart was made out of stone. Even so, she had a lewd body that reacted easily even without the use of aphrodisiacs.

It was a type of body hard to find even amongst famous prostitutes. However, Lucia was ignorant of all that. She only understood he was satisfied, and that was it.

Hugo held Lucia's hand and kissed her palm, then her wrist, and up to her shoulders, his lips wet against her skin. Lucia became embarrassed and had to look in a different direction while letting him do as he pleased with her body.

When he understood she was letting him do as he pleased, he stirred with more excitement. He stuffed himself into her slowly, feeling his length hardening and growing bigger.

Propping one of her legs over his shoulder, he kissed her damp leg and started moving his hips once more. Her eyes grew wide and when they made eye contact, her cheeks glowed red. She lowered her gaze down and she could see her body tightly squeeze his.

He had spilled his semen into her and her insides were very slippery, making it easy for her to take him into her body. She was able to take in most of his length into her body this time. He slid out only slightly, then continued to push himself into her. Her insides felt hot and moist; every time their skin rubbed against each other, he enjoyed the pleasurable sensations.

“Ung... Ah... ah...”

Weak moans slipped out of Lucia’s lips. The way Hugo’s firm member rammed into her had every intention of sending her senses to the heavens. The gradually rising ecstasy was amazing. Whenever he thrust himself completely into her, Lucia’s body would shiver from head to toe.

It was like her body was sinking in deep. She felt weak but filled by something. She had climaxed already, so her body was very sensitive. Every time he rubbed against her, a jolting sensation shot through her whole body.

She wasn’t intentionally trying to display her techniques or to be coy. Hugo’s body heated up seeing her hazy tearful eyes. Her body movements were minimal. Even so, she wasn’t merely acting, but responding truly based on how she was feeling.

He didn’t want to pull out from the punishing heat inside her. At the same time, he wanted to slide out and thrust in to excite their bodies. He moved his hips into a circle to stimulate her, where she responded as if by reflex. Her insides tightened while sucking him in and massaging his member.

He took deep breaths, doing his best to prevent himself from climaxing. She was like a demoness. Her lips were slightly parted and he could see the tip of her tongue. He craved to taste her. He wrapped his arms around her shoulders and waist and lifted her body up.

He pulled her closer so that they were face to face while softly supporting the back of her head, and kissed her while sucking on her tongue. Her flexible tongue seemed to be trying to escape. However, he continued to chase after it while pressing and lightly nibbling on it.

She seemed shocked for a moment and tried to draw her tongue away from him. While he continued to chase after her tongue, he enjoyed the game of conquering her mouth. This whole time, he was squeezing her buttocks as he kept moving his hips, pounding

into her.

Their salivas mixed and he enjoyed exploring every little corner of her mouth. He only parted his lips from hers when she pressed her hands against his chest.

“Hhaa... Hhaa...”

Her lips seemed a bit swollen as she gasped for breath. He chuckled and lightly kissed the top of her lips.

“Breathe through your nose”

Lucia, who had been glaring at him for trying to suffocate her, dropped her gaze down. Their naked bodies were twisted together and the moment she became conscious of their state, she got incredibly embarrassed.

She wasn't laying down and letting him inside her, she was sitting on top of him while admiring his naked chest. She was so embarrassed she couldn't meet his eyes.

When Lucia refused to meet his eyes, he felt a bit of heartbreak. Whenever he purposely tried to follow her gaze, she would turn her head in a way that would avoid his once again. He stubbornly continued to try, then soon figured out she was acting that way because she was feeling shy. He laughed softly.

Her body reacted in such a lewd way that it seemed like she wouldn't be able to survive without a man. Still, she was innocent. In this whole world, only he knew of her lewd nature. For some reason, he was very satisfied of that fact.

Hugo let her lie down once more. This time, instead of face to face, he laid her on her side with her legs clamped together, while he thrust into her body.

“Ah... uhn...”

He stimulated a different place with the new position. He sometimes only thrust a little, and other times he thrust in deeply. The first time Lucia had sex, she was too busy trying to endure the pain. This time, Lucia was drowning in pleasure.

When Lucia's consciousness returned to her, she wasn't sure whether she had woken up from a dream or whether she had woken up after fainting. Her head was numb and her body sluggish. When her dull senses sharpened, she could hear breaths in her ear.

She could feel his firm chest against her back. He was hugging her tightly from behind. One hand wrapped her hips, while his other hand was grasping her chest. His every breath tickled her neck.

One of his legs had squeezed itself between hers and it was as if she was sitting on his lap while laying down. Additionally, his aroused and firm member was resting against her buttocks.

Sunshine was spilling in from between the curtains and it seemed that some time had passed already. How many hours had passed?

She had always woken up early in the morning, so it was the first time she couldn't estimate the time of day. When she carefully tried to slip out of his hold, she felt his arm tighten and pull her back into his embrace. She felt his lips lightly kiss her nape.

"Your... Grace...?"

"...My name."

"...Hugh. Please... let me go."

"I don't want to."

His lips continued to kiss her nape and her shoulders. His kisses moved slowly, but they were deep. They stung a little, causing her skin to turn pink.

"Your Gra... Hugh. It's morning."

He didn't pay any heed to Lucia's small protest, and squeezed her breast. He rubbed his rigid member against her, enjoying her trembling from the stimulation.

Her face flushed down to her neck. He wanted to continue teasing and touching her. As if he was thrusting into her, he moved his hips up and down against her.

“Un...”

She let out a small muffled moan while huffing. He furrowed his brows and decided to rise up. Holding onto her waist, he pressed his firm member against her butt, while gradually sliding his member into her swollen, slippery, and sensitive entrance.

“Hhu...”

Her fingers tightly grasped the bed sheets. His member slowly entered and slid out fast, then pounded back into her. Whenever he thrust in and out, her insides spilled out slippery wet juices; eventually they began dripping down her legs. They looked like two animals copulating, while wet slurping sounds continued to shamelessly grow louder. Soon, she could feel a sense of extreme ecstasy wash over her whole body.

Lucia's body fell limp as if she fainted. He lightly bit her soft cheeks, pecked her lips, and sucked on her neck. He wasn't satisfied at all. He tasted her again and again, but no matter what he did, his thirst for her continued to grow endlessly. He wanted to bite down onto her neck and taste her blood. It felt like only then, his thirst would be quenched.

‘I'm crazy.’

He dug his nose into her neck and enjoyed the scent of fresh fruit. That woman's body was a deadly drug. No, even a drug couldn't feel as sweet as this. Hugo embraced her body tightly while thinking he had truly gone insane.

# Chapter 15

## The Ducal Couple (3)

One Morning.

Lucia observed the morning sunlight shining through and into her bedroom. She blinked several times to chase away her drowsiness. Using her hands, she brought herself upright.

Fatigue attacked every part of her body. She had grown used to waking up feeling tired. For the past month, Hugo had been visiting her bedroom every night, pouncing on her like a wild animal.

The explosive pleasures she shared with him drained a lot of her stamina. There was never a time that he would finish quickly; he would only stop after Lucia fainted from exhaustion.

She was kept awake together with him all night long. Each day, she would spend her day nodding off due to drowsiness, and when she managed to gather a bit of strength, night would arrive. Then he would lead her onto the bed for a night-long event. While she idled her days away, a whole month had passed within the blink of an eye.

By now, her body was getting used to these night long events and she was able to get up earlier while not feeling as fatigued. The first week, she was only able to rise by late afternoon.

Of course Lucia would never admit to him that her own stamina had gotten better. If she did, he would pounce on her with more fearsome strength than now. She wanted to stop spending her days in bed. It was so embarrassing to face all the servants tending to her.

Yesterday, he had been more persistent than usual. It felt like she could still feel him tightly thrusting into her. If she truly abhorred doing this, all she had to do was refuse. He wasn't one to rape her just because she refused. Honestly, it was tiresome but it was also nice.

Gratifying sex and many sensual orgasms causes fatigue, but it also brought forth a fulfilling feeling. He expertly rolled her left and right while pleasuring every corner of her body with his tongue. She wasn't able to compare him with any other man nor will she ever have the chance to in the future, but she understood that he was quite skilled at this.

He pleased her on bed, off the bed, even on top of tables and sofas. Every day he pleased her in a new ways while supporting her body in various positions. Although the nights were long, she could not feel any aversion to the sensual activities between a man and woman.

At first, she was shocked and thought of him as nothing but a beast. However eventually, she found herself climbing on top of him while bouncing her own hips up and down. Within just a month, he had taught Lucia the joys of sexual pleasure.

She pulled on a rope to call the maids. She washed and changed her clothes. Lucia observed her reflection with strange eyes. The maids behind her had their eyes facing the floor with shy eyes.

Lucia had worn a dress with a low cut neck-line and it revealed many rosy kiss marks. It looked like she had some kind of skin disease. The weather was growing hotter day by day but she had to cover herself up completely. Lucia sighed heavily and spoke.

"...I can't go out like this. Bring me something else. A dress that will completely cover my neck."

"Yes, madam."

The maids moved around busily. Lucia no longer felt embarrassed, she was shameless at this point. If anyone were to be in her situation every morning for a whole month, they would feel the same.

They were newlyweds, it's to be expected. But, it seems everyone around her was surprised that the duke would visit her every night. All the servants had been friendly to start with, but now everyone was serving her in cold sweat. She realized there was nothing more powerful than having a husband's love.

Late morning, Lucia enjoyed tea time on a simple table under the shade at the castle garden. This had been one of her daily tasks.



*'What a desolate garden... '*

The castle garden was vast and it was filled with nothing but year-round perennials. There wasn't a single flower in sight. One could not witness a speck of orange during autumn. The garden remained in the exact same condition even during winter. This style required less maintenance, but claiming it to be a garden was quite laughable.

*'Shall I renovate the garden...?'*

Other than Duke of Taran and his son, she was the only other person in the Taran family – the duchess. The duchess was usually the one to take charge in the designs of the castle interiors as well as the garden.

*'There's not much else to do... '*

Throughout Lucia's stay, she didn't have anything to do. She didn't learn flower arranging to pass the time like other noble women do nor did she have any particular hobbies. She didn't find joy in luxuries such as jewelry and accessories neither so there was no reason for her to shop for them. Every day, she read books for several hours and the remaining time was spent drinking tea and taking light walks.

*'I really... feel like a good for nothing.'*

One who doesn't work, doesn't deserve to eat. In Lucia's dream, she had lived by these words. When she was the Count's wife she had the job of partaking in parties and make connections with those in high society. On the contrary, if Hugo were to know this, he would have been confused. 'How can you have nothing to do?' In his opinion, though she still had a long way to go, she was fulfilling her role as the duchess very well.

"Madam."

While she wondered whether to start heading in, Jerome interrupted her thoughts. Jerome handed a single envelope to Lucia. Inside, she found a document. She scanned through the sheet of paper with furrowed brows.

"...It's the management of household accounts."

"Yes, Madam. It took some time to draw up a new budget because we never managed it before today."

All noble women who were married had to manage their own household allowances. In the royal palace, the queens and consorts were given allowances for overlooking and managing all the court ladies. Noble women were responsible for managing household living necessities such as the interior design of the house, hiring servants, and organizing parties for various social events.

“Originally, the budget didn’t include employment of servants and basic castle maintenance. This is the new regulated budget plan so that you will be able to control all the different aspects.”

“The newly calculated budget plan...? How much of this money am I allowed to use? Isn’t this money to be applied solely for employment wages and maintenance?”

“There will be gradual changes in the future. Madam, you will be the one who has the responsibility in making decisions on how this money will be spent. As long as it is within the budget, it is up to you how you spend this money.”

This place really had become Lucia’s very own private property. The amount of money was huge. She could barely count all the zeros that followed the first digit. This budget was extravagant, but Jerome had spoken of this budget as a mere trifling afterthought. As expected for a ducal household, their income is in another level than others.

*‘So now my life as a leech comes to an end... ’*

Now that she had been given a job, she had to show satisfactory results. As the prestige of the title of a noble increased, so did their amount of work. It was basic knowledge that the lady of the house was responsible for maintaining the harmony of the household. More importantly, they held the responsibility to support their husbands in the world of nobility.

*‘Let’s start from the garden... ’*

She didn’t have much knowledge on gardening. She had never taken care of a garden back in her dream when she was married to Count Marin. It took a lot of money to maintain a garden and Count Marin didn’t wish to waste his money on such things.

When she expressed her intentions, Jerome immediately organized a plan and relayed any of his own tips to her.

This would be the end of her draining mindless days. Today, Lucia ate her dinner alone.

Although the ducal couple ate breakfast and lunch on their own time, they usually took the time to eat dinner together. On this day, he had business outside and returned home far past dinner time.

Lucia read books in the private study, took a bath, and dried her wet hair in her bedroom. Usually her maids tended to her, but at this hour was the time he usually frequented her bed chambers.

Click, his grace entered her room by letting himself in. After he had chased away all his attendants, he welcomed himself into her room while wearing a single bath robe. This was also the case for Lucia. She had tied her bathrobe tightly and looked very proper, but underneath she wasn't wearing anything at all. At first, she felt odd, but now this felt natural for her.

He approached Lucia who was in front of her vanity mirror and gave her a back hug while kissing the back of her neck. Lucia closed her eyes while feeling his lips that on her nape. Her body felt faint. Was this what happiness is suppose to feel like? She felt a creeping fear that she would never be able to forget this moment and would live the rest of her life feeling lonely.

"I asked Jerome to deliver you something, did you receive it?"

"Yes. I decided... I wanted to revamp the castle garden."

"The garden?"

"I saw there were no flowers, was that your intentions? Is it okay for me to redesign the garden?"

"The lady of the house had always been in charge of the garden. Do as you please."

"We have to hire a landscape gardener and create a plan before doing anything. We will need to hire a large labor force in the beginning so the castle could become crowded. I don't know if that would irritate you."

Hugo knew nothing about the garden. In the first place, he had no interest in it at all. It was Jerome who thought it looked too pitiful for the garden to be so barren and filled it with vegetation that would need minimal care during all four seasons. He already understood that it would take a lot of labor and money to revamp the garden.

“Is the budget I set aside for you, not enough?”

Hugo took it upon himself to understand Lucia’s intentions of bringing up this topic.

“Huh?”

She was shocked. She didn’t need more money at all.

“Increasing the budget a significant amount is a bit troublesome. This year’s budget was already drafted and your budget for this year was created by taking away money from the provisional budget. But, I will be sure to consider it next year.”

The overall budget would be decided by the head of the family. Many times, nobles would go out of their way to ensure a specific percentage of the family budget before marriage. If the married couple are in love, it was correct for the wife to receive a heftier amount than the norm. On the other hand, when a man wishes to divorce his wife, the first thing he would do is try to scrape down his wife’s budget as much as he could.

This year’s budget division was already decided upon, so he had set aside the largest amount he could manage with what was left over. He already had plans to increase her allowance budget next year.

Lucia’s allowed monetary budget was not because she was the duchess. Noble wives would not easily reveal their own personal monetary information due to pride, but if they heard how much Lucia received they would have a hard time believing such a story.

“That’s not it. I didn’t bring this up for that reason. There are already a lot of people in the castle. I was afraid if I brought in too many people, you would become irritated. I wanted to make sure... renovating the garden wouldn’t get in your way...”

“Hundreds of people already travel in and out of Roam. It’s not like you will increase the labor force by several thousand folds. It doesn’t matter that you bring in a few more. The garden had always been overlooked by the duchess. It doesn’t matter if you chop down all the trees or make a huge pond. Do as you wish. You don’t need my permission to do such things.”

“...I’m not sure between the things I have total freedom and the things I need permission for. What are the limitations to what I can do?”

Lucia stared at him with confused eyes. At this moment, he lifted her up like a princess and laid her onto the bed. While returning her gaze, he softly supported her chin.

“How far do you want to go?”

This was an opportunity. Lucia wasn't dense. This was the exact same situation as when a King would ask their bedside partners, 'What would you like to have?' for love play.

A satisfied man would become lenient and with a bit of coquettish skill, the female would be able to gain much benefits. Most females behaved in this way.

Hugo waited expectantly, wondering what words would come out from her mouth. Her skills were on another level. Up until now, she had never requested anything from him. He had made up his mind that he would agree to anything as long as it was within his power. It would be best if it was something that could be bought with money. Women who were power hungry were no fun.

“I'm asking you because I don't know myself. As you've seen already... nobody had ever taught me any basics nor have I had an opportunity to learn such things. I don't know what a duchess should or should not do. I want to learn.”

Lucia had emptied herself of greed from the beginning. No matter how insignificant her greed may appear to be in the beginning, with time that greed would only grow larger. There was no guarantee that she would be showered with wealth the rest of her life just because she was a duchess. As for anything related to money, she didn't wish for a cent more than what she already had. Additionally, she didn't have a single interest with political power.

“A teacher...”

He paused while stroking his chin lost in thought for a moment. This was an unexpected request, one that he should have realized and done for her in the beginning. There were no adults in the Taran family who could become her mentor. Additionally, she never had relatives to guild her as a child either. Of course she could not learn.

“I'll look into it for you.”

“Thank you.”

A bright smile spread upon Lucia's face. While watching her smile, his own lips unconsciously quirked up. Her smile were always so pure like a child's. She wasn't smiling to seduce him, but whenever he saw her smile his lower half would throb with heat. It was the same at this moment.

He tried his best to distract himself with other government related topics, but he drew a blank in his mind while attempting to refocus. He remembered all the documents in his personal office waiting for him and was finally able to calm down a little. These days, he felt like a wild animal unable to restrain their natural instincts.

He waited for her to continue speaking but only found silence, so he spoke first.

"And?"

"Huh?"

"Anything else?"

Lucia's eyes grew round, paused for a moment and responded with a negative. He narrowed his eyes slightly while observing her. *'Was she stupid? Doesn't she have any greed? Maybe she is just trying to be sly?'*

Thus, Hugo could not believe that Lucia truly didn't wish for anything. Whether the other party was a male or female, many took a step back to advance another three steps.

She looked innocent now, but in a few moments she would be cuddled next to him while chattering her wishes into his ears. Whether it would be related to his powers or money, it was always the case. Up until now, there was nobody he knew who didn't harbor such intentions.

"Is it very tiresome to renovate the garden?"

"I'm not sure because I haven't started yet. I won't be personally planting all the flowers so... it probably won't be too bad."

"The garden. Must you renovate it?"

"I thought you didn't care about the garden."

"I don't care about the garden, I'm worried about you. Don't waste your energy on it. If you have so much energy then you should use it on me."

As his arms wrapped around her hips, Lucia's looked down shyly with flushed cheeks.

"...How do you expect me to expend more energy than now? I feel so embarrassed sleeping into the afternoon everyday."

"What are you embarrassed about? You should be proud."

"...Why should I be proud?"

"You should be proud of your husband's stamina -"

Lucia clamped his mouth shut with her hand and glared as her cheeks gradually glowed redder. He retaliated by licking the palm of her hand, causing her to immediately pull back. However, he caught her hand before she could escape and playfully licked her fingers. His tender kisses caused a strange sensation to climb up her shoulders making Lucia shudder.

Incredibly embarrassed, Lucia used all her strength to wiggle out of his grasp, but she couldn't budge an inch. As if he had the sweetest lollipop in his hand, he lovingly kissed and licked Lucia's fingers.

Lucia became breathless watching him take in her fingers into his mouth. Hugo's red eyes were locked onto Lucia as he observed her every reaction. Lucia felt an electric shock and squirmed while slightly biting her lips.

"Hugh... stop..."

It was embarrassing that she had such sensitive fingers that caused her body to react this way. As soon as Lucia felt the grip around her hand loosen, she pulled away. She tried to escape from him and turned her body, but he was faster. He wrapped his arm around her hips and pulled her into a hug.

Lucia laid her head against his chest as he embraced her. His hand that was on her hips slid up under her gown onto her bare back. Her skin tingled as his fingers traced her back while his other hand squeezed her breasts. He caressed her without holding back causing her to feel embarrassed.

She looked up and met his red eyes. Though his eyes were scarlet, they reflected an icy coldness. He could easily read Lucia and catch her embarrassment and nervousness just by observing her eyes. On the other hand, he didn't feel shy in displaying his desires of her. She felt suffocated being under his gaze so she could never hold his gaze for long.

As soon as Lucia lowered her gaze to avoid him, Hugo gripped her breast a little harder. Her body reacted with a bit of a shock.

She was different from all the women he had been with all this time. It had been very boring. They had screamed as if they had been dying, move their hips in a technical way while flirtatiously giggling. Compared to all his past women, she was reacted half heartedly and in a dull manner.

However, it's not to say that it's a wrong way to behave at all. Every women in this world doesn't need to have the best technical skills. If it were to be true, that would be strange. It was strange how much his body burned like an adolescent boy who had just awoken to their sexual desires. He thirsted for her body so bad.

He continued to massage her soft breast, then after awhile he slid the same hand down to her hips, then massaged the part by her inner legs. Her body trembled slightly in his hold. The tips of his fingers glistened with a slippery substance.

He smugly chuckled. This was what drove him crazy. He only massaged her body slightly but she was already this wet.

The slippery substance that is formed by the woman's body is one of the most important aspects to sex between a man and a woman. All this time that Hugo held Lucia, he had never needed to use extra aphrodisiacs. Her insides were moist like a flowing stream. This smooth feeling could not be compared to when he he needed the aid of extra lubricants.

Upon a kiss, her eyes would become blurred. Just a simple touch and her body would tremble. This past month, her body had become slightly accustomed to him but there were no drastic overall changes. She remained shy like her first time, yet her body reacted hungrily like she thirsted for the body of a man. His member was now several degrees larger and throbbing, he furrowed his brows while holding himself back. He was at his limit.



He lifted her body upright while positioning his thighs beneath her buttocks while letting her body float in the air just above where he could thrust up into her. He watched her eyes grow round and penetrated into her weak body just like that.

“Hk!”

He didn’t need to work hard for her insides to swallow his member. He liked to kiss and fondle her body before forcing himself into her, but from time to time he liked to thrust himself in without warning – like today as well. Lucia’s breath became faster from his sudden attack. He didn’t give her time to adjust and began pounding into her.

“Hk! Ah! Ahh! Hh!”

He pounded hard, then lightly. His firm member thrust into her. The strength behind his pounding caused her body to shake like a weak doll while her voice squeaked out constantly. Whenever he thrust into the deepest parts of her body a painful yet refreshing feeling dominated her body.

Although her vision blurred, she could see his muscles spasm from stimulation and her chest felt hot. At this moment, she thought how beautiful a man’s body was and that it really couldn’t compare to any woman’s body.

Her pumpkin colored eyes grew hazy as if she was drunk. He gazed upon Lucia who was drunk off sexual euphoria, admiring her. He felt his member throb with heat causing it to grow a degree larger, while her insides squeezed him harder than before.

He licked his drying lips and continued to thrust into her erotic body. Her body was the finest. He couldn’t express his true feelings into words. Her insides always threw his sanity off the window.

He let her sit on top of him while he squeezed her buttocks with his hands and pounded into her without holding back. The sound of flesh slapping against one another could be heard while her body continued to shake up and down. He bit onto her breasts that were bouncing up and down, hitting her sensitive nipples and leaving her to mewl while her neck tilted backwards.

He slid his hand up to support her back which was drenched with sweat. Lucia wrapped her arms around his neck and let him pound his engorged member into her as much as he wanted while she tried her best to regulate her erratic breathing. Whenever he thrust up from below she felt a hot sensation fill her body.

He untangled her arms from his neck and lifted her from below to flip her body around. She was positioned to sit on his lap while her back leaned against his chest. He was able to thrust up with much ease and power while Lucia yelped and gasped much louder.

“Hk! Uk! Ah! Hugh! Un!”

When Lucia let his name slip from her lips, he bit her ear lobe and started to suck on them.

“More. Cry harder.”

“Hk... ung!”

He gripped onto her breast while supporting her back with his chest and bit down on her neck. She screamed from the pain and sensual pleasure. His tongue smoothly licked on the sore spot of her neck. She felt her body float up for a moment and soon she was laid flat on the bed while her butt was positioned upright in the air. Without any warning, he thrust into her.

“Ah!”

He pummeled into her from behind with vigor. Whenever their sweaty skin made contact it reverberated with a lewd wet sound. Lucia gripped onto the bed sheets and tightly closed her eyes feeling her insides sing every time he thrust into her. Her head, which rested sideways, rubbed against the sheets as he pounded into her.

“Uk... Hugh... aau...”

Whenever she called his name, rather than his lower half, it felt like his heart was being squeezed to death. The painful pleasure overtook his body and he closed his eyes. He held onto her arm to steady her body while he continued to thrust inside of her.

The thrusting motion from behind hit deeper. It was straining for her because he didn’t give her a moment to rest. Regardless of her fatigue, her body continued to burn with pleasure.

“Hk!”

Pleasure flooded into her. A strong wave of orgasmic pleasure spasmed across her whole body while her insides squeezed and sucked in his thrusting member. He momentarily paused his movement, letting her breathe. But he didn't assume anything.

He pulled out his member and flipped her limp body around so that she could lay on her back. His body rode on top of Lucia's and entered into her at once.

"Uuk!!"

Her insides had become very sensitive and her body spasmed. He smashed her lips against hers. He massaged the inside of her mouth while tangling together with her tongue. The short but deep kiss ended and he moved his hips in a circular motion, prodding into various places while Lucia's body gladly slurped in his member with great joy.

"Haa... hha..."

Hugo brushed back the hair that was stuck on her sweaty forehead. He licked her flushed cheeks tasting the slightly salty and sweet taste of her body.

As if he was slowly paddling a boat, he spun his hips with steady breaths. Lucia's lips were swollen red and parted slightly, he took this chance to kiss her. It seems all these past few months of teaching did not go to waste as she took the initiative to tightly wrap her legs around his hips while she moved her own hips along with his movements.

Different than before, he moved in the slowest possible way. Her insides had become hypersensitive and the slightest movements caused her body to throb. Lucia's breath grew raspy as she gazed toward him.

His eyes were slightly warped in meeting her gaze. He grasped her swelling breasts while squeezing her nipples. He enjoyed making Lucia's body jerk and tremble.

"Do you find this place comfortable?"

"...Huh?"

"This place. Have you gotten comfortable yet?"

“Yes.”

He would ask her questions occasionally so as to hear her voice from time to time. It wasn't that she feared him or felt distrust towards him but, she never took the initiative to come closer to him. This part was starting to bother him a little.

“It will be troublesome if you get too comfortable. When we finish all the jobs of the dukedom we have to return to the capital.”

The capital.

It awoke Lucia from her sensual haze. Her body that was burning up chilled down at once.

Next year, the emperor will die and the crown prince will accede onto the throne. The Crown Prince and the Duke of Taran had maintained close ties. It was a strong partnership rather than one of loyalty and subordination.

When the Crown Prince accedes, the Duke of Taran must obey all commands. That would be the end of the regular peaceful days.

She assumed she would meet the Duke of Taran's original wife by then as well. It had been known that the Duke of Taran had a contractual marriage, but he had never personally confirmed the rumors.

It could be that Lucia had misunderstood and all the rumors were false. Maybe the two people were deeply in love. Lucia always kept in mind that she was in debt to them. She dreaded that she might have forced a precious love apart.

A strong force took hold of her chin, breaking her away from her thoughts. He watched her with a dissatisfied expression. He thrust up smoothly making her lose her breath. He gazed deeply toward Lucia while propping both her legs on top of his shoulders.

“You have the leisure to think of other things right now?”

Hugo growled in a low voice and began thrusting his hips. He wondered what she could be thinking to look so sad, he felt irritated by the idea that it was probably something unrelated to himself. However, he didn't understand why this made him feel irritated nor did he try to understand the reason.



A few days later, Hugo spoke while they were eating dinner.

“Tomorrow, the Countess of Corzan will be visiting.”

Lucia was thrown back by the sudden announcement.

“Do you have anything planned for tomorrow?”

The nature of someone who sets up plans and then asks if you’re free was irritating, but anyway Lucia’s day to day had become repetitive so she nodded without complaint.

“Should I prepare anything for our guest?”

She had paused for a moment waiting for more details on tomorrow’s event, but he didn’t look like he would explain further so Lucia took the initiative to ask.

“She is the mentor you requested for before. Whether you treat her as a guest or not is up to you.”

“...Yes.”

He was such an unfriendly man. His expression was stoic and his words short. He never said much in the first place, nor does he go out of his way to explain any of his words and reasonings. Still, it was interesting how he would patiently answer every question she asked him.

*‘I should ask Jerome of the details later.’*

Jerome should have information on the Countess of Corzan. Jerome didn’t easily reveal information, but he shared short snippets and episodes of the duke. Lucia inquired of Hugo’s past before in passing conversations and eventually she collected enough information to understand Hugo’s nature.

Her findings — he treated all his subordinates in an equally unfriendly manner. Don’t even start, he hates such a thing as explaining himself.

*‘He’ll be irritated if I continue to pester him with questions on this matter.’*

She drastically reduced her words around him while bottling her own criticisms inside her heart. Hugo snuck a glance toward Lucia who was drinking her tea calmly without a single expression of uneasiness.

It would be okay if it was just a slight degree more, but he wished her small lips would utter more words. She had chattered quite a bit their first night together, but after he asked her to be quiet and sleep that side of her completely disappeared.

“...Countess of Corzan is the current Earl of Corzan’s mother. To be exact, she is the Dowager Countess.”

He wished to continue talking so he had no choice but proactively break the ice once again. He began to speak.

“Her title, the Countess of Corzan is an honorary title. The countess is considered the god mother of the high society nobles. At a young age, she lost her husband. Even so, she did not re-marry and continued to protect the Corzan family’s earldom by raising her children by herself.”

“Ah... what an amazing person.”

“Many noble families wish for their children to learn the ways of nobility.”

“Is it okay to request for such an amazing person so suddenly like this? She should already have her hands full...”

“There should be no higher honor than being a vassal that obtained the position of a teacher under a ducal household.”

The Earl of Corzan was the Duke’s subordinate, but that didn’t make the Earl’s mother his direct subordinate. Yet, Hugo spoke of this in an arrogant manner, leaving her speechless. She continued to watch him and wondered how she was able to meet such an outrageous man. Gradually, her feelings swelled to one of pride.

‘It couldn’t be... he shouldn’t be such a childish person... ’

Lucia had been defining him as a perfect adult. Whenever he threw a joke or crept by her side to touch her, she passed it off thinking it was because he was a player.

“I see. Thank you. This was only possible because I am the Duke’s wife.”

“You’re thankful only with your words?”

“...I beg your pardon?”

Hugo waved his hand, Jerome quickly took notice and hurried to leave together with all the maids and footmen.

As soon as the two were able to be alone in the dining hall, he stood up from his seat and approached Lucia who looked to be confused and in shock. He trapped Lucia’s movements by placing his hands on the arms of the chair Lucia was seated in and drew closer to her.

“The Countess of Corzan is not easily moved, whether you fly or dance she is a picky one. She is very particular. Whether you try to get involved with her son for three months or ten days, she will not blink once.”

“Then how did you convince her?”

“There’s no need to know the details, I just put in that much effort for you.”

What did he want her to do? From time to time, she couldn’t read his mind at all. Did he wanted to be praised, *‘You’re amazing!’*? Does she need to be honored while feeling grateful?

Lucia hesitated for a moment, then she slightly raised her body and lightly pressed her lips onto his. Her answer was nearly correct, but not quite. He stared at Lucia as if he was boring a hole into her forehead, then the corner of his lips quirked up.

“Just this?”

# Chapter 16

## The Ducal Couple (4)

His hand caught her chin, bringing their lips together as his hot tongue swiftly parted her lips.

She took a deep breath as he pushed his tongue deeper inside her mouth.

He wrapped his tongue around her tongue and suckled as though to swallow.

Lucia's eyes grew misty so she closed her eyes and wrapped her arms around his neck. A passionate kiss ensued.

Their salivas mixed as their tongues continuously fondled each other. He grabbed Lucia from the chair she was sitting on and lifted her onto the table. Even as he did this, their lips did not separate.

In a quiet dining room, the tongues of two people were deeply entwined and the smacking sounds of the kissing echoed. Her red lips were being overshadowed by his lips and her small mouth was occupied by his tongue.

His kiss, that seemed to envelope her entire mouth, was stirring her body up. Her arms which were wrapped around his neck, trembled and fell down to his shoulders.

After the long kiss ended, he calmly and shamelessly, pecked her soaked lips. He went on, going down her chin and kissing her neck.

Her hands fell to Hugo's chest, grabbing his clothes firmly. When one of his legs slipped in between her legs, she was startled and pushed away from his chest

"Umm... you aren't thinking of doing it here, right?" [Lucia]

Hugo didn't think of doing so but when he saw her embarrassed state, his playfulness soared.

"We can't?"



“No!”

“Give me a reason. One that I can understand and I’ll relent.”

“Look... we can’t do this kind of thing where we eat.”

He lowered his neck a bit, giving a low laugh then he looked up at her.

“Then, what of other places? How does the hallway sound?”

“Definitely not!” [Lucia]

“The garden then? I’ve always wanted to try it outside.”

“Are you crazy??”

In the face of her first ever violent reaction, he couldn’t help himself and smiled.

“Why not?”

“Someone else can see it!” [Lucia]

“So if nobody is around, then it’s fine? If I send out everyone who is in the castle, the garden or the hallway is fine?”

“Uh...”

Lucia’s face went red and she bit her lips. If there was no one? Then maybe it didn’t matter. Anyways, she’d never been in the bedroom before either so why should she care if the location changes?

She had gradually learned over the last month that men and women can be diverse in the way they combine.

At first, it was really embarrassing but as time passed, it began to be fun and exciting. Lucia was beginning to understand why people were so eager to have sex.

However, she didn’t really want to do any type of play that she didn’t like, but the two of them were married. What could she say in the bedroom?

Hugo was expecting the sight of her cowered. However, beyond his expectations, he was greeted with the sight of her seriously considering it and was slightly thrilled.

Unexpectedly, she was really tickling the desire that he was already suppressing.

For few days now, he had the desire to take her day and night, no matter what and keep her in his bedroom but the problem was the fact her body did have the physical strength to handle it.

If she was hurt because of him then he would feel terrible. She was naïve but she learnt very fast. At night, he demonstrated all the techniques he had to her, but she had never shown any dislike. Although she was embarrassed and ashamed, she was also eager and enthusiastic.

‘Alright. Let’s do something exciting tonight.’

Imagining a new endeavor easily made blood rush to his lower belly.

“I don’t like it here...” [Lucia]

She couldn’t help it but she didn’t like it. He kissed her lips lightly then grabbed her hand and helped her down the table.

His erection was already begging for release but he held it in. Whenever he was with her, he often admired his patience. If the woman in front of his was not Lucia but one of the women he played with in the past, he wouldn’t care about their safety and would have just put it in.

After all for those ladies, even if their mouth said they didn’t want it, they actually did.

But Hugo was getting to know Lucia little by little. He knew that if she said she hated it then she really did. He wanted to respect her will.

This deep consideration of his, he wondered if she knew. Looking at her innocent look coming down the table, he concluded that she didn’t know at all.

“Are you going for a walk?” [Hugo]

Lucia enjoyed taking a walk after dinner. He decided to put off his piled of work for a while. He wanted to be near her more. He also needed to calm the heated in his body.

“Yes” [Lucia]

“Let’s go together. Or would that bother you?” [Hugo]

“No. It’s good” Lucia replied quickly and brightly.

It was his first time taking a walk with her. Seeing how happy and delighted her expression was, he turned his head and cleared his throat.

He didn’t know she would like it so much. The full-scale summer has not come yet, so the evening breeze was pretty good.

Walking alongside him, Lucia glanced at him. She was happy with his consideration as he walked slowly to match her pace.

She had held herself back from talking to him for a while but she’d always wanted to take a walk with him. They seemed more like a lovers than a couple bound to a contract.

“This year, I was thinking of making the garden full of flowers. It may be old fashioned\* but it is my first time anyways so it’ll end up like that”

“Is planting only flowers old-fashioned?” [Hugo]

“Of course. The world of garden decoration is profound. A beautiful garden requires moderate harmony. A good gardener or landscape designer is really hard to get. Most of them are already employed in other families.” [Lucia]

“If I get one, then it’ll be fine” [Hugo]

“It is not as easy as it sounds. Don’t you think that if you spend money to hire another “Jerome” from another family, Jerome would leave?”

“...That’s true” [Hugo]

Lucia was in a good mood and spoke more words than usual. As he listened to her voice, he felt much better. If he wasn’t busy, he should take more walks with her.

“It’s dark now, but the bottom of the tree is shaded during the day and I drink tea every morning underneath. It is said that it has been here since the castle was built and has

exceeded hundreds of years” [Lucia]

“Is that so...?” [Hugo]

Hugo then noticed the huge and beautiful tree.

This was the place where he lived since his childhood, but it was the first hearing of this. He was never interested in such matters.

“It looks pretty good. At first, I figured there would be nice.”

“Huh?”

“I thought of doing it there at first” [Lucia] *(TN: she means sex)*

“...”

He couldn't see how her face as it was dark but her mouth was wide open and her face was probably red. Her white face mysteriously went red like a ripe apple.

Looking at Lucia who quickly went ahead of him, he laughed, grabbed her wrist and dragged her under the tree she was talking about. He hugged her stomach, and leaning against the tree, pressed her down.

She swallowed her scream as he bit on her earlobes and finally whispered to her.

“If you don't stay still, I'll be for real” [Hugo]

He was satisfied as she immediately became well-behaved. Lucia was only released after he had kissed her till she was out of breath.



Although the ducal couple did not finish their dinner, the two of them were left alone and a servant approached Jerome.

“Fabian has arrived. I do not know when his Grace will be in the office so I had him wait in the steward's office”

“Good job” (Jerome)

Jerome greeted the waiting Fabian with a light embrace. Fabian had just come down from the capital.

Due to the excessive hunting of the Duke, the King had to be bribed with enormous gifts. Fabian could not imagine the king bemoaning the loss of the people's lives, he could bet his neck that that was not going to happen.

Although it was a bet with himself, the bribe was really great. Fabian never placed a bet that would hurt himself even as a joke.

"Uaah, I'm so exhausted. I want to hurry and report to his Grace. Is he done with dinner?" (Fabian)

It was not too bad but there were traces of fatigue on Fabian's eyebrows.

"I will tell him for you, you just go and sleep. I don't know when he will be coming" (Jerome)

"Why? The entire time I've been here, hasn't he already finished eating?"

"Because those two are together, it may take longer than usual" (Jerome)

"Those two? Who?" (Fabian)

Jerome looked at his loud and dull brother and clicked his tongue.

"It's her Grace. Who else would it be?"

"Her Grace? His Grace had dinner with the Lady of the House? Hooo. What's the occasion?"

"His Grace has dinner with the Madam almost every evening" (Jerome)

"..."

The face of Fabian's that was always astute and sharp, froze.

"Really?" (Fabian)

"Really" (Jerome)

“Since when?”

“Ever since the day he returned to the castle.”

Fabian then asked questions like ‘how many times’ or ‘Truly?’ and Jerome answered patiently. It’s not like he could not understand Fabian’s surprise.

Jerome would have found it hard to believe if he had not seen it with his own eyes.

“Since when did his Grace’s... no, this is not a matter of his tastes. The way I see it, I don’t think his Grace is having ‘only’ dinner with her Grace every evening.” (Fabian)

“Just say only up to there” (Jerome)

“Wow. This is true. It must be true. Oh my God. I can’t believe it. This is the person that cannot share a bed with a woman more than three times–“

Fabian suddenly received a blow to his abdomen and grabbing his stomach, buckling over.

Jerome, who had delivered a fist to his brother’s stomach, grit his teeth as he stopped Fabian from talking.

“Shut up. There are a lot of ears listening. What is this about three times? Don’t make up such nonsense.” (Jerome)

“Your words are right, that’s how it is. His Grace is a greeeat person. He is the romance of men.” (1)

“Oh really. I’ll pass on your words to Alice” (Jerome)

When his wife’s name was mentioned, Fabian’s face went blue.

“Ah... no. I’m not saying me but other men. Don’t go telling Alice strange things. And will you keep calling your elder brother’s wife’s by her name?”

“Elder brother’s wife, what bull. You mean *younger* brother’s wife?” (2)

“I’m married which makes me the adult. So, of course I’m the elder one”

It was the same issue these twin brothers fought over every time they met without ever coming to a conclusion.

“Hmm... Yeah. I think you have it reversed” (Jerome)

From the time when the Duke was 18 years old till when he rose to the top and became the Taran Duke, he took his retainers to his side, and they all knew all the females attracted to the duke in the past.

Even if the Duke did not chase after them, women were constantly attracted by his power, wealth, youth and charm.

However, amongst those numerous women, not one could move his heart.

To the duke, women were just for warming the bed. They were fun to play around with and when the woman started to want more, he threw them away.

It was their job to make a clean up after him, so that any woman that could not let go would not disrupt the Duke’s mood.

“We don’t know yet. Even that woman was with him for over year. Maybe he’s enjoying the newlywed play for a while. I think it’s pretty much like that. Well. Then, I’ll go to sleep. Help me tell his Grace that I will be there early tomorrow morning.” (Fabian)

This time is different. Jerome did not bother trying to explain. Once Fabian watched them, he’d figure it out. Fabian has said ‘That woman’ referring to the Countess of Falcon whom the Duke had met for more than a year, but at that time, she was not the only woman the Duke played with.

There wasn’t a day like this before where the Duke was only focused on one woman.

The next day, Countess Corzan visited. She was a graceful white-haired lady with a slight taller and lighter body than Lucia. When she was younger, she must’ve been quite the beauty, she was late in her years but it was still there.

“My greetings to the Duchess. You can call me Madam Michelle”

“It’s an honor to meet you, Madam Michelle. I hope I was not rude to suddenly ask for you.”

Michelle’s eyebrows went up, and the old noble’s eyes were curved slightly. In fact, Michelle was in a bad mood before getting here. Although the Duke seemed to formally ask her to teach the Duchess, in reality it was a one-sided request.

Michelle was a very proud person. Things like power or wealth could not move her. However, even if it was her, she could not ignore the request of the Duke.

The second problem was that her son was a vassal to the duke, and it was never the personality of the young Taran Duke to tolerate old lady’s pride with laughing generosity.

Because she knew she would not benefit from dragging it out, she had simply accepted the request. However, despite her feeling badly, when she saw the Duchess who greeted her politely and personally, she was relieved.

“It is a great honor to be able to teach you, Madam” [Countess]

“Thank you. I have many shortcomings so I’m afraid you’ll have a lot to deal with. Please come here.”

She sat down facing the receiving room and soon a maid came out to serve tea. Lucia drank her tea while admiring Michelle’s appearance. She didn’t know one could be so elegant while having tea. Even her hand gestures did not have useless movements.

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### Translator’s Corner:

(1). A man’s romance means men want to be with him/ be him. He’s also being a bit sarcastic.

(2). Fabian calls his wife, Alice “형수” (hyungsu) which means wife of the elder brother. While Jerome is saying she’s his “제수씨” (jesu-ssi) which means younger brother’s wife.



# Chapter 17

## The Ducal Couple (5)

“I have not learnt a lot of things. There are many things I lack to fulfill my duties as the Lady of the House so I asked the Duke to tell me about you. After which, I asked him to ask you to teach me. I hear you are a very busy person but please understand my reasons for interrupting your schedule. Ah, if my words or actions are not polite, please tell me.” [Lucia]

A smile appeared on Michelle’s tightly closed mouth.

“For manners, your Grace doesn’t have more to learn. The essence of courtesy is consideration for the other party. To learn how to sincerely treat the other person, and learning how to express that, is manners. your Grace already has those two things down, what else can I add?”

“You flatter me.”

Lucia’s face was tinged red. Michelle felt as though Lucia were her beautiful granddaughter and laughed heartily. She had thought that Lucia would be a very arrogant person since she was a princess.

She knew the duke was not really calling her for teaching but because Michelle was in a high position in the inner circle, to let the Duchess get a head start.

Michelle had never thought of the Duke of Taran as a good person. She didn’t want her son or her grandchild having the Duke as a role model. A competent man, yes, but not a good person. The duke was arrogant, unyielding, and regarded interaction with people as insignificant.

Still, she had to acknowledge that his eyes for people was outstanding. And now she sees that his wife’s eyes too, were also impressive.

‘The Duke found a good wife’

Some thought that because of the Duke’s extravagant tastes in women in the past, he

would marry a remarkable beauty but they didn't know what they were saying. The Duke was a very cold man and would not move without any benefits.

So, for a wife, he probably thought to pick someone who was good at listening, hassle-free, and suited his level. One day when she gets to see the Duke, ignoring the consequences, she would definitely tell him.

'Show affection to the Duchess'.

Even if it is not romantic love, at least, to not throw away his existing feelings. A woman who receives no affection would feel anxious about her place and becomes increasingly nervous (1). So with only her pride alive and she'll become full of thorns and increasingly picky.

Many people overlook the fact that if the mistress of the house is not comfortable, eventually the household will be shaken.

Though, Michelle had to admit that her predictions were wrong. She had seen a lot of people and could tell at a glance what type of person they were. The Duchess was obviously an innocent and clean person. She couldn't see any signs of anxiety or depression. It was the appearance of a woman who received plenty of affection.

"I believe you've been married for about two months." [Countess]

"Yes."

"Then, it is around the time to start outside activities. Starting with a light tea party would be good."

"What size would be good?"

"Since it is the start, it is okay to start small. Invite around 10 people, mainly wives of Duke's vassals. You can ask the head butler about whom to invite. The Duke's head butler is a capable person"

Lucia nodded her head. Jerome was definitely capable.

“Actually, I have a lot of people to meet. Do I have to open something like a ball?”  
[Lucia]

“Just because you are the Duke’s wife does not mean you have to be a socialite. In fact, social activities and your aptitude must match. You can’t not do it all, but it has to be done moderately. Around twice a month, throw a tea party or a garden party, inviting only women. It’s also good idea to sometimes increase the number from 10 to 30 people. “

Countess Corzan’s way of teaching was to give good advice while conversing. In a conversation that spanned nearly two hours, Lucia learned what she did not know and got to learn interesting new facts.

Lucia sincerely admired the Countess who spoke elegantly without getting boring and spoke skillfully. It was the same for Michelle as her heart was also moved. The more they continued to talk, the more Michelle was attracted to Lucia’s mild and ill-will lacking personality.

It was pretty hard to find someone with such a character. Michelle was in a good mood because regardless of the age differences, she had found a good friend.

“If you needs someone to talk to, I would like to introduce you to my niece. Her conduct is not elegant, but her character is bright and not flashy. She will be a great help to the madam in finding enjoyment in your northern life. ” [Countess]

“I’m grateful but I am already adjusting well to my life here and I don’t need a friend who will be trying to watch my mood.”

“Ho-ho. You are very honest. Kate is, ah, her name is Kate. Kate does not possess the ability to try and please her friends. If Kate does not like you, she will not become friends with you. ”

“Hmm, I’m interested. I’m willing to meet her. She sounds like a charming lady. ”

“She is a person with many advantages and disadvantages. When her friend’s fiancé cheated on her and deceived her, she did not hesitate to embarrass him. If someone

tells me her name, my head hurts wondering what incident she's caused again. "

"But you love your niece." [Lucia]

Michelle smiled brightly. Her eyes were filled with affection for her niece.

"Because she's a lovable child. But I am worried that there is no brave man that will marry her. Even though she hasn't married, she attends to and counsels young girls who are in love. She can become a good counselor for you. "

"But I'm already married."

"Marriage is not the end, it is the beginning. Before marriage, had you been in a relationship for some time with his Grace?"

"Relationship...?"

When Lucia thought about it, there was no relationship reason for meeting with him. As soon as they met, she proposed. At the second meeting, they signed a contract. At the third meeting, she was doing laundry then she got caught and got told off on something similar. Then she signed the marriage certificate.

"Umm... before marriage, I met with his Grace, three times."

Michelle's hand that was holding the teacup paused for a moment and she put down the cup.

"Can you tell me how his Grace treats you in the house? Actually, for me to talk about this would be considerable risk. It might be taken as slander against your husband to you, the Hostess. But Madam seems to have married his Grace without knowing him very well, it's a little sad."

"Tell me please. I promise not to keep it in mind." [Lucia]

"Well, first of all, could you describe to me, honestly, what kind of person his Grace, the duke is?"

“Honest... right?”

“Yes. Honestly.”

“Umm. He is... not fickle... but he acts as he pleases. Once he concludes and ends something. He turns his head and would never look back. He is an indifferent and cold person.”

“This. I seems to have said something pointless. Your Grace knows the Duke very well.”

The Taran Duke’s outer shell alone was the best thing about him. His stunning looks and body were the manifestations of women’s fantasies.

In fact, there were no single northern girls who had actually seen the duke once and not fallen into a one sided love, even though the duke never hit on them.

Daring girls actually threw their bodies at the Duke. Usually, the duke responded positively to their temptation. Then, the women fell into the illusion that he would soon fall for them. It didn’t take long for that illusion to break.

When the woman first gets hurt or falls for him and began to want a little more affection or love, the duke would throw them away with no hesitation. Many of the ladies Michelle had taught, had experienced this and were so hurt and would cry in front of her.

Thanks to that, even though Michelle had never properly spoken to the Duke of Taran, she knew more than anyone else about the Duke’s bedroom matters.

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Translator’s Corner:

(1). Her place as in her place as his wife. It literally said her ‘seat’ but I think place fit better.



The Ducal couple had been married for about two months.

It was the time where one could not abandon dreams and expectations of a honeymoon.

However, the Duchess seems to have accurately figured out his Grace. It was evidence that she had not completely fallen for her husband. Michelle was surprised and pleased about that.

“Excellent. your Grace is not forgetting about herself. A woman is a truly sad existence. When they give their hearts, they have the tendency to excessively depend on the recipient. When the person disappears, they cannot stand alone and collapse, abandoned.”

Lucia smiled awkwardly and nodded her head. She was being praised but did not feel happy about it. Lucia could not forget about herself because she had given up everything in the first place.

“But, you should not excessively keep your husband at a distance. Maintaining the right distance is very important.” (Countess)

“Maintaining the right distance...” (Lucia)

Lucia nodded her head.

“I’ll ask a rude question. How many times a week does his Grace visit your bedroom?”

“Yes? Ah...”

Lucia’s face went red. “He comes... everyday”

Michelle’s eyes grew slightly but assumed an air of indifference and replied, is that so. She had found out a very interesting fact.

On the contrary, the one being distanced was the Duke. If Michelle were alone, she would have burst out laughing. The Duchess who appeared innocent suddenly looked different.

Men always want what they cannot get and the Duchess was maintaining the perfect

distance to make the Duke want more.

“Keeping the right distance... how do you do that?” (Lucia)

“I’ll tell you, little by little.”

Michelle said while murmuring inwardly, ‘It doesn’t seem like there’s anything more to teach her Grace.’

It was obvious to her that as more time passes between ducal couple, the emphasis in the relationship would gradually shift towards the Duchess.

This was a speculation from Michelle who had consulted and personally watched over many men and women relationships.

But there was one mystery that Michelle could not solve.

‘Just what charm of this person shook the Duke?’ The Duchess, of course, had no way to know that the Duke had completely fallen for his wife’s body. It was to the extent that he couldn’t get it out of his mind.

Countess Corzan, afterwards, decided to visit them regularly. And, after about a week, Lucia decided to throw her first tea party.

“Your Grace.” A maid with a flushed expression spoke carefully “Is it possible that you are pregnant?”

“Pregnant?”

Lucia knitted her brows at those ridiculous words.

“You have not had your menses for more than two months. Since there is no other way to know so how do you feel about having a checkup?” (Maid)

The most important work of the maidservants was looking after the health of their masters.

It wasn’t until after two months had passed that they discovered that something was

seriously strange with their mistress' body and needed to be looked into.

If a specific maid had continuously attended to Lucia, then it would have been noticed faster. However, the maids took turns over several days to serve her and kept assuming a different maid had waited on Lucia when she had menstruated.

Even then, they naturally did not forget to perform their jobs and when they got together and conversed, they realized none of them had seen Lucia menstruating.

At that moment, all the maid were frightened. The first thing they were suspicious of was pregnancy. There was no one in the Roam Castle that didn't know that the ducal couple's relationship was passionate.

"No. It's nothing like that so don't worry about it."

Lucia replied coldly, her eyes showing no excitement.

"But still, your Grace, seeing a doctor..."

"It is nothing like that. I know my own body very well." (Lucia)

"...Ye, your Grace."

The maid withdrew but did not give up. If be any chance, the Mistress was pregnant and in that state, she was unaware and something went wrong with the baby, the maids would be firmly dealt with.

She could not stop being anxious and quickly went to inform Jerome.

"Your Grace, I heard from the maid that there seems to be a problem with your health."

The moment Jerome arrived and began to speak, annoyance flitted lightly across Lucia's face then it went away.

Her eyes stopped for a moment on the maid that was standing behind Jerome. It was not a menacing glare but the maid couldn't help but shrink.

Somehow, since it was Jerome's first time seeing her Grace like that, he became nervous and started cautiously.



“Mistress, has the doctor ever made you feel uncomfortable?”

“It’s not like that. I’ll say this again, I’m not pregnant nor do I have any health problems. This is something his Grace already knows.”

Jerome fell silent for a moment, considering what to say.

“But your Grace, if by any chance a problem is found with you, we will not be able to avoid responsibility for it. May I confirm again with his Grace about this fact?”

From the beginning, she had already said she couldn’t get pregnant. He had only asked if she could prove it and afterwards showed no interest.

It would be too surprising if he were to say that she was lying all this time and the truth was that she could become pregnant.

“My words are not lies however I will tell him again.”

“May I confirm afterwards that your Grace has told him?”

These days, Jerome had been pretty meek around Lucia, but he was never an easy person. If he was only a good person, there was no way he could be the head steward at such a young age.

“...I’ll inform him when you are there. Is that good enough?”

“Yes, Mistress. I’m sorry for making you uncomfortable.”

“You are just doing your job as the head butler. But that child.”

Lucia’s gaze once again locked onto the maid.

“I was definitely clear on what I said yet you ran to the butler without asking me. I don’t want to have someone who is keeping tabs on my movement by my side. Please send her out today.”

“Yes... your Grace.”

The maid’s face went black and she dropped her head while Jerome bowed his head with an earnest expression. He had thought she was a simple and nice person, but she

knew just when to start and when to stop, making her seem a bit cold.

It seemed like his two masters were matches made in heaven. The butler who felt satisfied and full by just seeing this new part of his master was one step closer to being master-lover.

# Chapter 18

## The Ducal Couple (6)

A few days passed by and Jerome continuously hung around Lucia.

“Your Grace, I don’t about other things but about whether you are pregnant or not, it’s be good to be sure.”

Eventually, Lucia agreed to receive treatment from Anna.

“It is not pregnancy.”

In contrast to Lucia who accept it naturally when Anna said this, Jerome had a slightly disappointed expression.

But before Lucia could raise her head and see it, he quickly hid his expression. He didn’t want to take the chance of letting his disappointment hurt her.

“Did her Grace have any symptoms that made you suspect pregnancy?”

Since Anna was suddenly called to verify if Lucia was pregnant, she was a bit suspicious.

If Lucia was truly suspected of pregnancy and Anna couldn’t verify it, they would be worried about her ability as her primary doctor.

Jerome made a promise with Lucia. After they verified if it was pregnancy or not, he wouldn’t mention anything about the state of her body and the task of informing the duke about the situation would be left to Lucia.

“No, Anna. Her Grace seemed more tired these days so...”

“In my opinion as a doctor, there’s a different reason as to why her Grace is tiring easily. A woman’s body is not steel. Head Butler, let me speak to his Grace once. Anytime is fine. Her Grace is already needing restorative medicine at such a young and energetic age. After I finish working, I take a break from work. This is pretty much the same thing.”

Anna was only giving her opinions as a doctor, however the more she spoke, the stranger the mood became. Jerome stared at the air uncomfortably while Lucia looked down.

“Isn’t your Grace having a hard time? Please pass my words onto the Duke.”

It wasn’t like she was having a hard time but Lucia’s face was currently dyed red and she couldn’t say it. Especially not with the current mood in the room.

‘I like him coming to my room everyday’

She couldn’t say it at all.

“If it is hard for the head butler to say then, I can tell him myself” (Anna)

“Ah, no. I... will tell him. So... to what extent...?”

“Five days. And with a day of rest.”

“...Yes.”

Even though Anna could sense the embarrassment in the air, she remained brazen. If a doctor was talking about a patient’s condition and got embarrassed, they wouldn’t be able to treat them properly.

After they all left and Lucia was alone, she went to the bedroom, opened the big windows and went onto the balcony.

A tender breeze gently passed by.

Just for an instant, when Anna announced that she wasn’t pregnant, Jerome’s voice lost its energy.

Lucia felt a bit bad. In her dreams, she was 15 when she started menstruating. No one was around to teach her that those were the signs of becoming a woman.

Usually, the inns taught those things but in the palace there were no inns and the palace maids did not care if it was not their business.

The orphan-like young princess, to the palace maids, was not a master that they had

to serve but a burden they had to take care of.

Whenever she had menstrual blood on the bed, the maids would have increasingly annoyed expressions as they changed the bed sheets.

After entering the palace, Lucia had lost almost all of her youthful cheerfulness. She became more timid and spoke fewer words.

The young Lucia of that time did not learn how to call the people under her or act majestic and with dignity.

‘I might die soon’

The fact that she was continually losing blood from her body was horrifying to her. She became extremely obsessed with her fears.

‘I have to stop the blood so i need medicine. I have to take medicine...’

A drug that stops bleeding. At that time, an herb accurately appeared in her mind. It was an herb called mugwort.

Mugwort was a very common herb with three leaves. It could be seen growing here and there, and even in the palace it could be seen growing around.

When mugwort was boiled hard, dried, ground and then sprinkled onto the wound, it would have a hemostatic effect.

It was an emergency medicine that the common people used for first aid when they could not find or afford a doctor. Its effect was incomparable to a doctor’s work but it sufficed.

Lucia had learnt first-hand that it had the ability to stop bleeding. In the past, she and the children of the village had run around the neighborhood, digging up grass here and there.

She had fallen and scrapped her knee and ground mugwort was sprinkled on her injury. At that time she had just thought it was fascinating the way the blood had stopped flowing.

Hence, Lucia started taking the mugwort herb from the garden. She didn’t know how

to make it for consumption so she just ate it raw.

She simply thought that because the blood was flowing from her body, it made sense to eat it.

Surprisingly, the effect was immediate. Her period did not come.

So, the next month when she bled again, she took it and in that way, continuously for half a year, after which she completely stopped bleeding.

At the time, she had no idea what had happened to her. She didn't even know the word infertility itself.

Later, while she was married to Count Martin, she found out the truth of her body's situation.

'Thank goodness.'

That was the first thought that came to her. The moment she learnt that was no chance of her giving birth to a child for the Count, she felt as though she had stopped walking towards the edge of a cliff and her heart felt completely at ease.

After the marriage with the count ended and Lucia became free again, she started to look at her body. Apart from her abnormal infertility, there was nothing wrong with her body.

But for a woman, she knew it was a fatal problem to have hence, she started to look for a cure. Every doctor that visited her shook their head. They all said that mugwort was poisonous herb that should have never been eaten.

"I'm not sure if the infertility is rooted... oh, you ate it? Just why would you do such a thing..."

Even then, usually, the doctors couldn't understand Lucia's symptoms. Therefore, she was rather amazed when she found out a new fact.

It was rare but there were competent doctors who had seen symptoms similar to Lucia's before.

"I have seen a woman who stopped menstruating because she ate something

unknown during menstruation, however this is the first time I have seen someone in a long term infertile state from eating something... but have you gotten married? Pregnancy can happen even if your period is irregular. It may not be infertility.”

But her period was not irregular; it never occurred. However, she had never tried to have a child before so couldn’t answer with certainty as to whether or not she was pregnant.

Then a more knowledgeable doctor came along and gave Lucia new information.

“A long time ago, when we lost the war and women were caught by the enemies, there was a story that they would eat mugwort on purpose to avoid having children for the enemy. It seems that they thought that if the menstrual cycle was stopped then naturally, it would serve as a form of birth control but it has been proven that mugwort has no effect on contraception.”

The doctor’s answer was pretty ambiguous. Lucia did not give up and in her spare time asked about any skilled doctors then visited them. But time had continued on and she was growing older.

She was about to give up. She was old enough and there was no discomfort in her life without her fertility so she was going to act like nothing had happened. Then one day, a wandering doctor chanced upon the town she lived in.

At first, none of the villagers believed the dirty old man’s claims that he was a doctor. However, as the doctor remained in the village and gave treatment, more people began to see the positive effect and were swayed to believing him.

Lucia went to see the doctor since she had nothing to lose. The doctor was temporarily staying at a room that someone in the village had left, and just like when he first arrived, he was dressed shabbily.

However as they conversed, an image different from his outward appearance was revealed. His expression and manner of speaking were gentle and somewhat dignified.

“Did you really eat the mugwort herb? And then your menstruation stopped?”

When she told other doctors about her symptoms, they would look at her as some kind of rare animal which made her embarrassed but this doctor was different. He was both surprised and intrigued.

“Why? When? And to what extent did you eat it?”

Because he had a different reaction from all the doctors she had met till now, she grabbed onto one last hope and answered all his questions diligently.

“From my first menstruation onwards.” (Lucia)

Right after she said that, the doctor’s eyes strangely lit up.

“By any chance, are you a virgin?”

“No. I’ve been married before so I’m not a young maiden.”

Truthfully, she was pretty much like a virgin but she didn’t want to tell the doctor things to that extent.

The doctor was somewhat disappointed and gave a bitter laugh.

“In my eyes, you are a very young lady.”

“Is my condition infertility?”

“Yes.”

It was the same answer that all the previous doctors had given her but she was desperate.

“Can it... be treated?”

The doctor chuckled and guaranteed her treatment that no one else had been able to do.

“You are a lucky person. There is a treatment method passed down in only my family.”

So he gave her a prescription containing various drugs to be mixed together. He didn’t write it down but he took a book out of his bag, tore a page from it and gave it to her.

“Since it is a secret method passed down in your family, is it ok to give me this?”

“In any case, it’s not something I need anymore.”



The doctor's expression as he said this seemed a little sad.

"I... Can I really get better? They all said mugwort herb is a poison."

It wasn't that she didn't believe the doctor's prescription but that she had gone through hardship to get it treated and yet here he was, giving her a simple solution. The situation itself was a bit unbelievable.

"Poison... yes, it is known as such. This is an exclusive but I'll tell you something special. Mugwort has a surprising effect. It doesn't just do something simple like stopping blood flow. If you eat it, it completely purifies the body. That is the reason why menstruation stops. But the human body itself is a mass of impurity, there is nothing good to forcibly purify. The effect of the herb is just that strong so such side effects occur but it does not harm your body. And apart from not having your period, you haven't gotten sick anywhere else, right?"

"Yes."

"In fact, to become infertile from eating mugwort, you must have been eating it for a long time, for example, from your first period onwards. Like you have. If you haven't been taking it for that long, even if your menstruation stops for a while, there are no other symptoms. And something like infertility will definitely not happen. But, people treat it as a poison because of its only symptom, which is to stop menstrual flow. Anyways, because it is not poison, if you weaken the effect of the herb, your body will return to its original state. If you regularly take your medicine, it will surely get better. I hope for you to have a pretty child and become a happy parent. "

Not too long after, the doctor left the village. Unlike when the doctor first came to the village, the villagers were truly sorry to see him go.

Lucia went ahead and bought herbs that had been prescribed by the doctor.

"Why are buying these two herbs together? Surely, you aren't planning on mixing them together? If you eat them together, you'll have a huge problem!"

The prescription combinations that the doctor gave her didn't seem to be one that complied with commonsense.

However, Lucia didn't think she could get worse and she was curious anyways so she followed his directions and started to make the medicine.

As long as no abnormality happens, once a month, steadily take the medicine until menstruation starts again; how to eat and how frequent was easy to know. She did wonder if it would actually work but then she shook her head and chose to believe it.

A lot of time passed and suddenly one day, her menstruation restarted.



Now the Lucia who had seen all this in a dream was not embarrassed like her 15 year old self from the dream. She already knew that she wasn't sick and was not going to die.

However the 15 year old Lucia was mentally unstable for a reason different from the one in the dream. She had thought that she could change anything in the present since she knew the future however there was nothing that a young princess, locked up in a palace room could do.

It felt like a prophecy that the coming future would be exactly like the dream. The thought of getting married to the count at 21 again was extremely sickening and she couldn't bear it. Her fears reached its climax as soon as her menstruation started.

'I do not want to give birth to that bastard's child.'

She already knew that getting pregnant was surprisingly not very easy. There were many married couples that had no children. Moreover, considering Count Matin's sexual capability there was almost no possibility of her getting pregnant. However, she didn't want to let the slightest possibility remain.

So, she chose to make herself infertile. The doctor she met in the dream had told her that the mugwort herb was not poisonous and the treatment method that she had received remained in her memory.

Since she could treat at any time with the medicine, there was not really any worry if she was currently infertile.

Lucia could cure her infertility at any moment but she had already told Hugo that she could not get pregnant and would not suddenly tell him that she could.

'At that time... I had thought I would get divorced... '

When she proposed marriage, she had thought that they would live together for a few years then he would ask for a divorce or after a reasonable amount of time, she would ask herself. However,

‘I won’t do something like divorce.’

Even if he did not mention the family tradition, he was the kind of person that would not proceed with the divorce process because it was annoying.

She had no idea if there was another woman who loved him to death and wanted to marry him by all means but it didn’t look like that was possible.

‘I already said I wouldn’t regret this... I made up my mind to endure.’

There was going to be no children in her life. The moment she signed the marriage certificate, she was already prepared.

[I hope for you to have a pretty child and become a happy parent.]

It would seem that whether it was the dream or the present, the doctor’s wish would not be fulfilled. Lucia dug into her memories for the doctor’s name.

“Philip.”

Right. That was his name.



It was afternoon and as usual, Jerome brought tea and quietly entered the Duke’s office. Because it was obvious who was coming in, Hugo didn’t take his eyes off his documents. But as Jerome didn’t go back and kept standing by the desk, Hugo raised his head.

When the Duke’s eyes left the documents and faced him, Jerome opened his mouth.

“Your Grace, Madam is planning to have a tea party tomorrow.”

“Yes. I’ve heard.”

“Since it is her Grace’s first event, what do you think of sending a congratulatory gift?”

“A gift?”

He gave a low ‘hmm’ and mumbled, lowering his pen and sitting more comfortably in his chair.

“A gift, huh.” (Hugo)

“Yes. Her Grace will be extremely pleased.”

Now that he thought about it, he didn’t have anything to give her. He was not the type to easily know when to give gifts but if he was told to get this and that, he could.

But she didn’t tell him what to get and he didn’t know what she would like and couldn’t think of what to give her.

Was it enough to make the budget plentiful?

She didn’t ask him to give her anything but as it was her first time debuting in the northern social circles, it was enough reason. If she receives a gift that she could never imagine, wouldn’t she like it?

When he thought of her sparkling eyes as she expressed her thanks, his mood somehow grew merrier.

What would be good? Jewelry? Or maybe... jewelry? If that didn’t work... then jewelry? Jewelry was the only thing that he could think of. He was sure that women like jewelry but strangely, he wasn’t too sure that Lucia liked them.

While his worries were deepening, Jerome was patiently waiting for his master’s answer. Jerome’s ear picked up the sound of a soft knock at the door.

In order not to disrupt his master’s thought, Jerome left quietly then came back after a while.

“Your Grace, Sir Philip has arrived and is outside. He said he hasn’t returned in Roam in a long time and wants to give his greetings to your Grace.”

# Chapter 19

## The Ducal Couple (7)

For generations, Philip had been the Taran Family's doctor and was absent from Roam since Hugo had left the estate for a long time. Nobody knew exactly where he went.

He'd said he would be travelling around for a bit and left but there had been no news for years. Philip had no friends or family so his absence didn't have much effect and no one was really curious about it.

The Duke was very healthy and had never even been ill before. Also, for formality sake, as a noble, one did not receive regular check-ups from doctors.

Since Hugo became the Duke, the doctor hadn't had anything to do. Apart from greeting Philip a few times, Jerome had not really had a conversation with him. He had heard Philip was the also primary doctor of the deceased Duke even so that doctor... he was definitely a family doctor but he was a bit unique in that he was also a Baron.

Jerome believed the man had a lot of guts because he'd served dukes for generation but apart from that, he didn't feel the need to pay attention the doctor's matters.

However, the moment the name Philip left his mouth, his master's face which had been somewhat relaxed, froze. Seeing his master's red eyes gleam, Jerome felt suspicious. Wasn't Philip simply a family doctor?

For a short moment, he searched his memories thoroughly but there was no clue regarding Philip and his master's relationship. He then came to the realization that his master and Philip had actually treated each other like they were air and this would be the first time Philip had personally come to meet the Duke.

On paper, he was the primary doctor but the duke being the duke, he had never needed to receive any treatment.

"Let him in. Do not let anyone onto the second floor until I say so."

His voice was cold and murderous intent lingered in the air. Feeling his master's anger,

Jerome nervously followed the Duke's orders without question.

"Yes, Your Grace."

Jerome left and after a while, an old man with half whitish and grey hair walked in. The man walked quietly to the front of the desk where Hugo was sitting then bent his waist to make polite bow.

For a moment, Hugo didn't say anything, just stared piercingly at the old man then he spoke in an even and unfeeling voice.

"It's been a while, old geezer."

Philip was not displeased with the title that showed no respect and gave a faint smile.

"Yes, long time no see. After all this time, you've become a grown man."

Despite being only a doctor, the man was confident and showed no servility to the noble personage in front of him. His voice was calm but inside deep emotion surfaced as he faced Hugo.

His gaze was like that of a grandfather watching his grandchild that has done well. However, Hugo's eyes stayed frozen.

"I heard you went on a trip." [Hugo]

"I have returned."

"Too bad, you must have had a good time wandering around. Since you've said your greetings, get lost. In the future, don't do such things like greeting me. I'm saying you shouldn't show your face in front of me again."

As though he were reading off a book, Hugo's voice was arid but the contents were harsh. Philip's complexion remained unchanged as he heard the ferocity in Hugo's words. Rather, he seems a little relieved.

"You are still the same as before." [Philip]

"My nature's never change."

“Young master’s nature is outstanding. You didn’t reap this old servant’s life after all.”

Hugo laughed sardonically.

“Don’t misunderstand. The reason I let you live is because I owe you the debt of a life. That stupid kid had said he’s protect his life’s savior.”

For a moment, yearning surfaced on Philip’s face but it disappeared the next second.

“...Young master Hugo was a good-natured person. That’s why he wasn’t fit to be the master of Taran.” [Philip]

‘Young master Hugo’

Just for a short moment when those words left Philip’s mouth, Hugo’s gaze softened.

“That’s true. Because of that devilish child, I’m taking care of this dirty seat.”

“Young master Hugh...”

“If you call me by that name one more time, I’ll rip out your mouth.”

Hugo’s countenance changed viciously and he roared at Philip. Like that of a wild beast before it pounces on its food, he wanted to stand up immediately and bite off Philip’s neck but was barely holding himself back.

Facing Hugo’s fiery anger, Philip merely had a sad expression.

“That person sacrificed himself for the young master’s sake.”

“I never asked for that.”

Hugo gloomily ground his teeth.

The Hugh who was more beast and animal-like met Hugo when he was on a vacation. The moment when Hugh came back from the vacation, the devil had become a human.

That the owner of Taran would become Hugo was most suitable. Only he could cleanse Taran that was smeared with dirt and filth.

Hugh had always surrounded been by enemies and he had done many evil deeds to keep himself alive but actually he did not know just why he had to live or the meaning of life. On that vacation, Hugh finally found a reason to live and learned that there was something more precious than his own life.

That only brother would have to live and climb unto that seat, the one called the devil should not be Hugh. (1).

“Young master Hugo wished more than anyone else for the young master to be on that seat. Anyways, you two are of the blood of Taran. Naturally, young master has the right to be master of Taran.”

“That devil died that night in the west tower. I’m... the one right here now is Hugo.”

“Yes, it is the young master. When will you accept the fact that you are now the master?”

“I won’t be here forever. I will hand it over to that child when he’s old enough.”

Philip gave a small sigh.

“Young master Damian is still young.”

“That’s why I’m waiting, isn’t it? I’m waiting and bearing this sickening and tiring place.”

Hugo responded while gritting his teeth.

“Young master Hugo’s seat is one full of weariness. Hence, it’s a nobler position.”

Hugo stared at Philip for a moment then spoke coolly.

“Well, I’ve always known that old geezer is good at keeping his head. That day, if you had blabbered on just like today’s, I would have pulled out your neck and thrown it away. At that time, like a dumb person, you kept your mouth shut and knelt down. Did you know that I killed everyone who knows of what happened that day except from you, old geezer?”

For the first time since entering the room, Philip’s expression stiffened.



“...You left no traces.”

“Yes. I was disgusted and couldn’t stand their sight. So geezer will be the last. Hurry up with your filth. Once you disappears, it will no longer reek.”

“The deceased Duke made the inevitable choice for the family...”

“Choice?”

Hugo slammed the desk violently with both hands and bolted upright. He moved forward and his red pupils were like a blazing fire as he looked at Philip... no, someone he could see beyond Philip, with rising anger. His rage was like a furnace that would overflow at any moment.

“That old fool sold his one of his son to mercenaries as a slave to be put to work however instead of embracing the son that he chose, he once again tried to change them.”

He chose Hugo, abandoned Hugh. However, as years passed, the duke changed his mind and this time around, abandoned Hugo and chose Hugh. For the reason that Hugo’s personality was too mild. For the first time in his life, Hugh had clung to someone and pleaded. Not for his own sake but for another’s.

[If I obediently become your successor, don’t touch him] (2).

Hugh did everything that was asked of him. He studied earnestly and changed himself into a noble and self-restrained personage.

He also assumed Hugo’s appearance on his exterior. His coarse way of speaking was thrown away and like a reared beast, he fell nicely at the feet of the duke. However, he had no idea.

That for the same reason, Hugo had gladly thrown away everything he’d learned until yesterday from the venerable Confucius and listened to the Duke.

It was Hugo who first noticed that the Duke had tied strings to both of them and held sway over them in his hands and that moment was the beginning of the tragedy.

Hugo had realized that as long as he existed and the duke who would use him to the end existed, they could never be free.

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## Translator's Corner:

1. There's a bit of confusion and disconnect for me while translating this paragraph and the previous one. Hope it came across well. "Seat" means the seat of being the head of Taran

2. He means don't touch Hugo.

\*If you're confused, the current Hugo was formerly Hugh and the former Hugo... to be continue LOL

Hugo had realized that as long as he existed and the duke who would use him to the end existed, they could never be free.

And on the day he left to Roam, Hugo brutally and thoroughly murdered the Duke and anyone with him, then slit his throat and died alongside the duke.

“He was someone who couldn’t catch or kill a bug so the one who drove him to do such a cruel thing was that old fool. It was to the extent that I had nothing to say. What choice? That was not choice just ugly greed.” (Hugo)

“Young Master.”

“Stop calling me young master. I am now the Lord of Taran and the Duke. Are you still living in the world from 10 years ago?”

The tall and firm wall around him did not show any gaps. Philip sighed. For a long time now, he was unable to end his feelings and he’d thought that now that the young master was an adult maybe he would understand. It was a fruitless expectation.

Would the Taran bloodline end this way? Is it right for such a noble lineage to end this way? He wondered if his father’s dying words were karmic. Originally, there was no precedent in which twins were born into the Taran lineage. Maybe the unusual occurrence was a warning.

“I heard you were married.” (Philip)

“So?”

“That person must not give you a child.”

“Then it can’t be any better.”

“Do you understand what the Madame wants?”

“I’m warning you now, don’t you dare try approaching my wife!”

Hugo fiercely bared his teeth. Surprise flashed through Philip’s eyes.

“Young master Damian needs a bride. Otherwise, the bloodline of Taran...”

“Shut up! you prattle on about such dirty things pretty well.”

People had no idea of when the Taran family started or why it took up residence in the desolate North. They did not know why the Taran family, with so much strength under its belt, would live quietly as servants to the King.

The one and only purpose of the Taran Family. The truth that only the head of the Taran family from generation to generation and a select few knew.

It was the preservation of the Taran bloodline. And to achieve that purpose, they found the safest and most secure position for their plan. It was a land that did not appeal to the greedy or desirous and was a place that not everyone could handle. The north was a place made for Taran.

Now the only remaining people who knew of this truth was Hugo and the old geezer in front of him. Hugo had grabbed and killed everyone who knew, leaving no stone unturned. The old geezer wouldn't have been able to avoid death if it wasn't for the fact that he'd saved Hugo's brother's life in the past.

“Did you know this? You guys are savages and I point at those bastards in the north who won't stop leeching off my sister.” (Hugo) (1).

“You must not judge it by the moral standards of an outsider. The Taran bloodline...”

“I've said you should shut up about that. I don't want to hear shit about those nonsense bloodlines. Normally, women do not hurt their children! More like monsters, what noble lineage!”

Philip slowly closed his eyes with a heavy expression then reopened them.

“...you still say such words. Then... is young master Hugo a monster? What of young master Damian?”

“...”

“Though the deceased Duke chose such an excessive method...”

Hugo smirked then sneered coldly.

“That jerk of a father... no, stop. I think my mouth will grow filthier.”

“The Taran bloodline must continue...”

“That damned obsession. Such dirty acts will end with me! Hey, you crazy old geezer. I don’t believe things like God exist but you should thank God that your neck is still in place. If you touch my bottom line one more time, I won’t owe you anything. Wherever you live, whether it is Roam or somewhere else, just like you’ve been doing till now, don’t let me see you, just shove yourself somewhere. This is my last warning. Get out. Right now. If you show your face around my wife, I will rip your heart out.”

Philip looked at Hugo for a long time without saying anything, then he bowed his head, turned around and left the office.

Hearing the sound of the door closing, Hugo rose and in a pose of pushing against the desk, tried to adjust his breathing. His clenched fist was shaking violently. Kill him! He wanted to kill that bastard right now! Rip his heart out, break his neck and throw him into the most miserable place in the world then throw him to the beasts to eat!

The thing inside of him screamed viciously, threatening to break out. His whole body seemed like it was boiling and his red eyes darkened even more looking like blood.

After a long time, his breathing slowed to a more comfortable pace. It would be difficult for the monster inside him to come out now.

He was Hugo. Hugo would never abandon the prestige of his place as the Duke. It would be easy to kill the old geezer. But he couldn’t. It would have been better if the life debt was for his own life, then he couldn’t care less about it.

When Hugo had completely calmed down, he called for Jerome.

“You said you brought a female doctor from the capital, right? As my wife’s primary doctor?”

“Yes, Your Grace. Shall I call her?”

“You don’t need to do that. That old... no, Do not let Philip get close to or even approach my wife.”

He knew that Philip had nothing to do with her as of now but he hated the fact that

Philip was anywhere around her. He didn't want her to be hurt by Philip saying unnecessary words. He'd hate that. He didn't want to see those amber eyes sad.

"I understand. Do you want me to place surveillance where they wouldn't notice?"

"As long as he doesn't enter the Roam residence otherwise leave it alone."

"Would it be okay to inform her Grace?"

If he told her not to do something, strangely, it was her nature to become curious about it. He didn't want to make her conscious of Philip.

"...No. Let them meet naturally. Don't let her have questions."

"I will do as you have asked."

For a second, Jerome's thoughts went to the events that took place in the western pagoda. There was no workers left in the Castle that had personally seen the events that took place. Except one person. And that one person was Philip, the family doctor. He didn't know why those thoughts suddenly came to mind but he thought to somewhat tell his master of it.

"Your Grace, the other day, her Grace had asked why the west tower was locked."

Hugo's eyes immediately sharpened.

"So?"

"I told her truthfully what I knew. I told her the former duke and duchess died, and that your Grace's twin brother... my apologies. I had judged that it was okay for the Madame to know. I was thoughtless."

"...No. It is something she'll learn of anyways. What did she say after she heard that?"

"She were a little surprised, but she was more worried about your Grace."

"..."

Hugo stood up from his seat.

“I will be going out for a horse ride so don’t prepare dinner. I may be quite late.”

Jerome bowed in answer to the duke and waited as the duke went past him and out then he lifted his head with a grim expression.

‘What of a gift for her Grace... ’

It was definitely not the right mood to ask. On the surface, the Duke was no different from usual but after Philip went in and came out, he felt like the atmosphere had become pricklier. He immersed himself in his thoughts for a bit then shook his head. It was not the right behavior of a steward to dig into matter which his master hadn’t told him to.

“Then... as a present for her Grace... how does a flower sound?”

# Chapter 20

## The Ducal Couple (8)

The first tea party was pretty small. She had invited a total of eight people, mainly wives of the duke's vassals and elderly noble women. She followed Jerome's advice on whom to invite and the atmosphere of the party stayed amicable.

Lucia was a bit nervous at first but after she got to her seat, she realized there was no need to be nervous.

The social system here was a different one from the one in the capital where you had to be ready at any time to fight tooth and nail in such gatherings. In the north and as the Duchess of Taran, she was already in a superior position.

They all exchanged pleasantries and were harmonious so there was no needless consciousness of her mood. If Lucia had used her authority and hurt any of these old lady's pride, no matter how much they laughed in front of her, the instant they were at her back, they would heap criticisms.

Lucia kept her courtesy at a level where it was not too much but neither was it too little but this was Lucia's first time being the host for a tea party.

In her dream, Count Matin pestered her excessively to socialize but he never supported her properly. After all, once you open a tea party once, you have to keep opening one.

Throwing a tea party once and then deciding to quit was not something one could do. There was also the fact that throwing tea parties regularly cost a pretty good amount of money.

Count Matin was a miser who would grasp money tightly and wouldn't let go. On that subject, her body was pretty lenient on her considering what she ate and used.

Although Lucia's experience as a host was lacking, for many years, she had attended countless parties in her dream. Even though it was mainly from having listened to someone else's words and then hastily putting it into action, experience was



experience.

All the noble women in attendance were experienced madams. The atmosphere of the party flowed well even if Lucia did not take the lead. Or rather, the elderly noble women were easier to handle than the young maidens.

There was no need for the needless exchange of nerves, prominent amongst young female nobles and everyone here was in a relationship where they would be seeing each other's faces for a long time so there was no need to hide what they wanted to or not wanted to say.

As she listened to the conversations of the madams, there were times where she'd join in the chat or even laugh. The ones who were surprised were the noblewomen. The young Duchess was now 18 years of age but she was not nervous in the slightest.

The women here had daughters or even granddaughters of the same age as the Duchess, but compared to the Duchess, their children could only be described as immature.

'Indeed, a princess.'

'She's full of elegance.'

'To think she'd be so steady.'

Lucia was merely one of the common princesses in the palace but she was of the royal household. In the northern social circles, it was a big occasion for one to go to the capital and visit the royal palace and for the nobles, the status of a princess, even if it was just one, was an existence they had to look up to.

Compared to those her age, she was unusually calm and they had all accepted her with dignity and elegance. The older they were, the more satisfied they were with the young Duchess' serene appearance.

The young Duke of Taran was a very rash, coarse and hard to approach opponent so the relatively mild Duchess was very appealing to these noble madams.

"Soon, are you going to open up a grand ball? My granddaughter told me to definitely ask you."

“No, there is no plan for that yet. I prefer this, just accompanying the madams to talk about trivial matters. A ball is too noisy and complex.” (Lucia)

“That is a very good point. If you open up a ball, the younger ones will be the ones coming over to play.”

“I agree. Drinking until dawn and then staggering around doesn’t look so good.”

The noble madams swiftly supported that. Memories of themselves playing around in their youth seemed to have simultaneously disappeared from their minds.

“Please excuse my rudeness.”

Jerome came into the terrace as their conversation was reaching its peak. A tea party was an event for women alone, even the people serving were to be women only so it was customary for men to not interfere.

“Is something the matter, steward?” (Lucia)

“I apologize for disrupting your Grace’s enjoyment. His Grace sent a present to celebrate your Grace’s first social event. May it be brought in?”

The expressions of the madams filled with excitement at once and they exchanged glances. With her face slightly red, Lucia gave her approval and maids filed in. They all held beautiful flowers in their bosom. It was a feast of beautiful red flowers; roses, tulips, chrysanthemums, geraniums...

It was indeed an assortment of red flowers. The maids began to put them in every corner of the terrace, they put some in vases, then they started to decorate all around the table.

Very quickly, the interior of the terrace was filled with sweet floral scents. At the very least thousands of the flowers were fully bloomed.

“Oh my, oh my goodness.”

“I never thought the Duke would be such a romantic person.”

No matter how old they got, women loved flowers. The madams tossed away their etiquette and cheered happily. Now that they had grown older, the fluttering heart for

love that they had in their younger days had waned but upon witnessing this unexpected romance, their passion was rekindled. Having received this unexpected gift, Lucia's heart also beat faster.

"You say His Grace sent this gift... did he have any words for me?"

The experienced steward did not panic at her question.

"He hoped that you'd take kindly to the theme for today's present."

Lucia's eyes widened slightly then she gave the steward a soft smile.

"You've done well, Steward. I would like to give his Grace my thanks personally."

Continuously, till the tea party ended, the noble women mentioned how envious they were of her. Surrounded by them and their words, Lucia's face reddened till it looked like one of the flower petals. Lucia gave each one of them a bundle of flowers to take with them as they made to leave.

Even then, there were still many flowers remaining. The noble madams returned to their homes, extremely satisfied with the beautiful present that was neither overbearing nor lacking.

"You've worked hard, your Grace. Looking at the bright expression on the faces of the noble madams, it seems that they all enjoyed the tea party."

"I also enjoyed myself and you too have worked hard, Jerome. But, I have something to ask."

In that instant, Jerome's shoulders stiffened. These days, her Grace rarely went on the offensive.

"...Yes, your Grace."

"The flower present. His Grace did not order it, right?"

"What?"

Jerome frantically exclaimed despite himself and asked her a question. As Jerome slowly turned pale from astonishment, Lucia couldn't help but chuckle.

“At first, I had thought it was a gift from him. I would have been deceived if you hadn’t said anything after that. ‘He hopes that you’d take kindly to today’s theme’. That person is not the delicate type. How could you not know him better than I do?”

If Jerome had said that his Grace had no words for her, she would have thought that the gift was something Hugo had sent.

“Ah... that... Your Grace. W-well, it... it’s...”

Lucia warmly comforted Jerome who was stuttering pitifully.

“It’s okay. Thank you for the present. Jerome.”

“Your Grace! It’s not like that. His Grace really wanted to send a gift but he did not know what to send. That’s why I sent flowers...”

“Really?”

“Yes. It’s the truth. Please trust me, your Grace.”

Lucia examined Jerome whose complexion was pale and stiff with doubtful eyes then gave a low hum. His expression looked so pitiful she decided to drop the topic here.

“I understand.”

“Your Grace, it truly is.”

“I said I understand. I will give my thanks to his Grace.”

In a different way, Jerome was now difficult to deal with. If she were to give her thanks personally to the duke and something went wrong... but at this point, she couldn’t say no. Even if he meant well, undeniably it was an act to deceive her.

“I shall be sitting here for a little while longer. The flowers smell very nice.”

“Yes, your Grace. Shall I bring you some tea?”

“I’ve already drank a lot of tea. There’s no need to.”

Jerome withdrew and Lucia sat for a while in the quiet terrace, enjoying the scent of

the flowers.



During the timeframe of the tea party, Hugo was having a meeting. Hugo held regular meetings with his vassals, knights and local lords.

From their point of view, holding a meeting once a month was good enough to know the state of things but all of Hugo's other meetings were held at least once a week and then met frequently to hold meetings.

His style of meeting aimed to provide solutions to the issues that are raised during the meeting. So, when he enters a meeting, people were only able to come out after it was over and with faces full of exhaustion. There were many cases where the meeting had started in the morning and lasted till evening.

Today's meeting took a long time too and was only done sometime after the tea party had ended. Thankfully, the time for dinner had not yet passed.

The current time was a bit too early to have dinner but it was also a time without any particular purpose so Hugo asked Jerome about Lucia's whereabouts.

"Her grace is on the terrace."

'Ah. The tea party.'

[Since it is her Grace's first event, what do you think of sending a congratulatory gift?]

'Damn,' He lamented a little. He'd wanted to send a present but then forgot about it.

Yesterday, his mind was focused on something else, and today, he'd been in a meeting since morning and hadn't had time to think of anything else. Well, at least today still wasn't over. Even if it was a little late, as long as it was given today, there probably won't be any problem.

"Is she still having a tea party at this time?"

"No, Your Grace. It's been a while since it ended. Her Grace is just passing her time on the terrace. And... since you did not give any orders on a gift for her Grace, I used my judgement and sent flowers and decorated the terrace."

“Hmm? Okay, you did well.”

As expected, his steward was very capable.

“You said she was on the terrace, right?”

Looking at the back of his master, Jerome couldn't bear to tell him that her Grace was currently suspicious of whether his Grace had truly sent the gift of flowers.

This incident was undeniably Jerome's fault. It was the first time in his life as a steward to hide his mistake from his master.

Ignoring Jerome who was busy drowning in his sense of shame, Hugo took light steps towards the terrace. As the day drew to a close, the red glow of the sun was cast on the terrace and the moment Hugo reached the terrace, he stopped walking.

Lucia was sitting down with her eyes closed, supporting her chin with her hand on the table. It was as though terrace was enveloped in a blanket of silence, it was not a heavy silence but a serene and calm one.

‘What is she thinking of?’

He didn't want to disrupt her contemplation but he was also curious as to what she was thinking about and was tempted to immediately bring her back to reality. Looking at her peaceful face, his heart couldn't help but grow calmer. She looked so comfortable and at ease that it took his breath away.

Hugo slowly closed his eyes then reopened it. Sometimes, when he looked at her, he felt strange. He felt like there was something pressing down on his chest and he couldn't quite make out what was in front of him, like something unknown was gnawing at him from the inside.

It was not a pleasant feeling but this feeling did not make him unhappy or uncomfortable. In his life which had always been clear and precise, she was a puzzle piece that he'd been unable to find a place for.

Suddenly, her eyes flew open. When she discovered his presence, she gave a smile that was radiant as sunshine. Hugo momentarily furrowed his brow. His heart suddenly felt like it was being pricked with a needle and seemed to ache.

These days, he kept having abnormal symptoms in his body. So far, he'd never fallen ill and as for wounds, his body recovered remarkably fast so he never needed doctor and had lived without one.

'...Do I need to ask them to call in that old geezer?'

What was he thinking? Philip's face was one face he didn't wish to see even in his dreams. Lucia quickly got up and ran towards him.

The very enjoyable tea party, the fragrant scent of the flowers and the sad but beautiful glow made by the slowly setting sun, all of it had slowly elevated her mood. She had been enjoying the quiet peace on the terrace and just when that happy feeling had reached its peak, he arrived.

Lucia expressed her currently bubbling emotions by running into his arms.

"Woah..."

As she had suddenly ran into him, he was stunned for a moment. He held her waist firmly with his arms as she rubbed her head on his chest and relaxed into his arms.

He responded by embracing her soft bosom to his body then he lowered his head and kissed the top of her head. She was doing cute things she'd never done before.

If this was what she had learned at the tea party today then he didn't mind opening one every day.

He smiled tenderly, lightly grabbed her chin and gave her a soft kiss.

"Was the tea party fun?"

"Yes, thank you for the present."

His gaze immediately took notice of the terrace which was covered in flowers. It would seem that the gift that Jerome had sent on his behalf had made her very happy, and with that, he was satisfied.

'Just why do women love flowers? They can't even eat it.'

He couldn't understand it but in the first place, he could never understand the

existences called women anyways. His sight moved towards the bright and blossoming red flowers that seemed eager to show off their beauty, and his gaze landed on the rose flowers.

His eyes slightly stiffened.

[Please send me a rose.]

Suddenly, the words she had said came to mind. He then felt an ominous foreboding.

‘When did she say that?’

In his extraordinary memory which could remember everything from the day he could walk, an error seemed to have occurred.

As his heart grew restless and desperate, his memory became more disordered. He struggled to remember the memory of something that had happened just a few months ago.

‘Right. The contract... the condition she gave me the day we made a contract.’

[If you believe that I am unable to control my heart, please send me a rose. ]

‘This... Damn it.’



# Chapter 21

## The Ducal Couple (9)

He felt like ice cold water had been poured on his head. No, it was a much clammy feeling, as though his body had been bound and the inside and outside of his body was filled in rancid filth.

‘I feel dirty.’

Apart from those words, there was no other words to describe it. It was not just simple annoyance but the really annoying discomfort you feel when you pull your feet out after stepping in mud and there is mud all the way to your ankle.

No, it was a bit different from that. It was akin to thinking he had caught the enemy off-guard but ended up meeting them as they already knew beforehand and were waiting for him.

No, not like that either. He earnestly and anxiously tried to capture what exactly the feeling he was going through was but he couldn’t deduce an answer.

Her clear eyes were starting to at him with a little suspicion. He needed more time to think.

“Are flowers that good?”

“Rather than being happy about the flowers, I’m happier that you sent me a gift.”

Her expression was bright and purely full of joy. It seemed as though she had accepted the meaning of the present as simply a present but he didn’t dare to openly ask.

Then she would know that the present was not something he had sent and because she knew it as simply a present, she would be disappointed.

“I’m glad you liked it.”

He hid his restless mind and on the surface, responded very calmly but inwardly he

harbored a minor grudge with Jerome. Out of all the possible presents, why did it have to be rose flowers?

Although they were many other kind of flowers there, all Hugo could see were the rose flowers. Hugo lowered his body and easily took her up in his arms. Lucia let out a scream due to his sudden actions.

He sat on the table, placed her on his laps, wrapped his two arms around her firmly and propped his chin on her shoulder.

“Your Grace...?”

“Just wait a moment.”

After she'd struggled a little then gave up, Hugo started to think. Feeling the temperature of the small body in arms gradually getting warmer, he calmly explored his memory.

‘Yellow. Right. It was a yellow rose.’

At first, just seeing the red flowers he was flustered and surprised but after the moment of surprise passed, he began to think rationally. No matter how much he looked, there was no sight of anything yellow.

There was no sight of the yellow rose that he'd sent to women to signify their parting. He instantly felt relieved.

Initially, he had no idea that those women would be receiving yellow roses. He had simply ordered Jerome to handle the matter adequately by himself but he never inquired about how it was handled.

But then, one day, a woman who had received a yellow rose came to find him and threw a bunch of yellow roses at him. Even though they had only met up a few times, she was a woman he'd thought to have had quite the personality.

After that incident, Hugo got to know that there was a flower known as the yellow rose. To him, once it was colorful, they were all the same flowers, but the yellow rose was one flower he was aware of.

He never asked Jerome why amongst all flowers he sent yellow roses but it seemed

meaningful so he asked Jerome to keep doing what he was doing.

‘Does she know it is supposed to be a yellow rose?’

No matter how much he thought about it and sorted through the conversation they had while signing the contract...

‘Yellow’

There was nothing specified about the rose (1). But, looking at her reaction, she didn’t seem to take the roses sent today in that sense.

And the farewell gift was a bunch of roses. Since this huge pile of flowers wasn’t it, he arrived at the conclusion that clearly, he had defined it differently (2).

Now that he’d solved one problem, he once again recalled his memories of the contract day. The conditions he’d put forth that day were the two documents. And then there were two additional conditions.

Freedom in his private life and to never fall in love with him.

‘You crazy bastard’\*

Why did he add such a useless condition? He originally would not use a condition in a contract if the situation was one where it could not be documented. What happened was the result of her sounding him out and then confronting him.

Freedom in his private life was not really a problem. There was no need for him to marry a normal wife and then fix his eyes on another woman. That would be too troublesome. Sometimes he could play around and then with the flip of a hand, suddenly change his mind but anyways he was a man who open about his contradictions.

[I will never fall in love with your Grace.]

The problem was with this. His thoughts flipped back and forth, he felt as though his heart had been hit with a strong force and his breath was caught in his throat.

Moreover, her oath was covered by two shields (3). She had declared to him: ‘I will never give you my heart and if by any chance I do, please send me a rose.’

And he had initially thought that it was a condition advantageous to himself and gladly agreed.

‘You stupid fucker.’\*

He’d disliked himself originally but it was closer to disgust, he’d never thought of himself as a fool. In fact, he was very confident about the ability of his body and his brain but that confidence was slowly cracking.

“Whew, it’s hot.”

She twisted her body in his arms. As the strength in his arms disappeared, she pushed away from him with both hands and released her upper body. As the cool air hit her skin, she let out a small breath. He dropped his gaze and was stared dazedly at Lucia who was flushed slightly red from the heat.

‘This woman does not love me.’

[If that’s so, then I’m thankful.]

In the past, that was how he thought towards women. A woman’s love is annoying. They would give him their heart which he didn’t want then buzz around asking him to reciprocate. The love they had for him was ultimately based on what he had. Those women loved his power and his wealth.

They all loved the Duke Hugo not the Hugh who didn’t have anything to his name. And to him, of course Lucia was the same.

The person she wanted was himself as the Duke. But gradually that conviction of his was growing blurry. She hadn’t shown any interest in his power and wealth.

But he couldn’t know yet. They hadn’t been married for that long. Some people can hide their original motives for tens of years. That is what his rationality kept telling him but why does his sensibility keep telling him that something is different about her?

‘Do I hope for her to cling to me...? Like other women? Why?’

It was a mystery that he was completely unable to solve.

‘And if she ends up clinging to me... what am I to do?’

If that occurred then it could be a breach of the contract. But... if the contract conditions could not be kept then what about it?

His pupils momentarily twinkled. Their contract had a very fatal loophole. First, undocumented contracts cannot assert legal effects.

Secondly, the contract did not mention any specific details about destroying or renouncing the contract when the conditions were not met. He didn’t see anything about divorce.

He had initially said that intending to block the annoying divorce process but thinking about it now, it was a clever foresight.

‘A rose? What about it? What if I don’t send roses forever? And so what if send some again?’

As he had stared at her for a while, her gaze grew increasingly questioning. His red pupil sank deeply into her amber eyes.

She was his wife. She was his woman and no one would dare argue with him about that. From the moment she signed that marriage certificate, she was entirely bound to him.

‘This woman is mine.’

The conclusion he’d arrived at made him very satisfied. Love or whatever it was ultimately didn’t matter. She would never be able to escape from his hands. Possessiveness and obsession with her had begun to sprout from within his heart.

“Did the meeting not go well?”

She couldn’t place her finger on it but something about him was different from usual.

Because he was such a remarkable person, she couldn’t imagine there being a problem that he was troubled with but the north was a vast land and he was the lord over many people, on the contrary, if no problems occurred then that would be strange.

Truthfully, Lucia was a bit sulky towards him.\*\* Rather than letting his servant handle

the gift, it was better to not have given it at all. However based on what Jerome had strongly asserted, Hugo had thought about the gift itself and her heart was slightly inclined to believing that.

And, at the tea party today, the noblewomen were concerned about the young and seemingly innocent Duchess and gave her some words of advice.

[Men are simple beings. There is no need to think about it complexly. Even if he just gifts you one flower, as though there are no gifts more precious in the world, jump into his arms, embrace him and thank him. If there is any passion, that passion will overflow.]

[You have to keep pretending that you love the gifts so that they will keep coming in. And from time to time say phrases like ‘my husband has done a great job, wasn’t it hard?’ you will find that he will be extremely soothed.] (4).

She’d now learnt how to keep a hold on her husband while they lived together but what could she do with that.

As they smiled and chatted, the noblewomen gave similar advices while Lucia sat there quietly and diligently piled the advices in her head.

Until she had run into his arms and embraced him, there had been no intention to follow the advice of the noblewomen. In that moment, she was just purely happy to see him.

However just then the advice came to mind and the situation was simply perfect. And so Lucia put aside the complicated circumstances surrounding the flower gift and actively expressed her gratitude.

“The meeting had no issues. You said you liked the present, right?”

As his gaze on her was very intense, Lucia hesitantly tried to come down from his knees but his arms closed around her waist.

“Yes...”

“If you like it then you should return the favor.”

‘Really, this man is completely shameless’. He definitely knew that the gift was not

something he sent yet he didn't seem to be conscience—stricken.

She considered spilling the beans but then Jerome would be scolded, she didn't want to start up trouble for nothing so she let it pass.

"What would you like?" (Lucia)

"Is anything possible if I want it?"

"If it is something within my capacity to do, then yes."

As he leaned in and whispered something into her ear, Lucia's face grew redder and hotter.

"No way!"

"It'll be over soon."

His lips drew near to her lips and their lips touched.

"It's almost time for dinner."

"I'll finish before then"

She continued to resist the little kisses he showered on her.

"I don't believe you."

"You say that so easily. Since when did my credibility become so little?"

"Why don't you try placing your hands on your chest and thinking about it?"

Every time they were in bed, he would say 'Just one more time', or 'this is the last time.' And because she didn't believe he would trick her, she would once again be deceived. He didn't care about any of her complaints.

He gave a small heave and lifted her from under her thighs and above her skirt. The position of her legs were changed to spread around his thighs as she was firmly perched on him.

Her position sat them face to face, her legs were as though they were wrapped around his waist and her nape was dyed red as she looked at him.

If not for clothes being in the way, there was practically no difference from their position when they had intercourse. She could already feel his excited male part which meant that he was really planning on doing it there.

“What do we do if someone comes?”

“My steward is not someone without tact. I bet if we don’t come out of here after while, he’ll handle it himself.”

‘That’s even more embarrassing!’

Lucia bit her lips and didn’t know what to do. One of his hands had already slipped under her skirt and was groping around inside. His other hand was nestled on her back, pulling her in as he bit her earlobe lightly and licked it.

“At first, I wanted to do it in the garden but then when I thought about it, with the weather being as it is, there will be a lot of insects. If you faint while we’re doing it, that would be difficult. Wait no. That wouldn’t matter. Even when there are no bugs, you occasionally—”

“...If you add one more word, I will bite off your lips.”

He chuckled and replied playfully, “Yes, Your Grace.”

He kissed around her eyes as she glared at him bashfully. He swallowed her red lips and breathed in her sweet fragrance. He started moving to make good use of the time she had given to him, however he didn’t keep his promise about when he would finish.

Dinner time had already passed when they were done so they ate a very late dinner.



As Jerome brought some afternoon tea to his office, placed it on the desk and turned to leave, Hugo spoke.

“From now on...”



Jerome stopped walking, turned around and walked back to the desk to listen to his master's words.

"I don't care about other flowers but no more roses. Do as you see fit but I do not want to see any more of that particular flower."

Jerome did not fully understand what his master wanted but he replied that he would take care of it. He wondered if yesterday, her Grace had been offended or hurt by the present that he had sent. But looking at the mood between the both of them today, it didn't seem like that. As he was thinking about roses, a memory suddenly rose to the forefront of his mind.

"Your Grace, the other day, her Grace had asked me if I had sent a yellow rose."

His hand that was signing instantly stopped moving, causing the ink from the pen to drop and spread under the paper. He frowned slightly and pushed the document away.

"So?"

"Her Grace asked me if she was right about Lady Lawrence being the last person to receive a rose and... I answered positively."

On the night of the victory party, she had witnessed first-hand the sight of him breaking it off with Sophia Lawrence. He'd forgotten.

Rather than saying he'd forgotten, saying that he didn't feel the need to worry about it was more accurate. He could somewhat get a glimpse of why she saw him as an unscrupulous and shameless villain.

"And..."

"Is there something else?"

Hugo's voice grew a little sharper. Perhaps because of the mood, Jerome didn't study his master's face or he would have seen his master's visible discomfort.

"Her Grace asked why the last person to receive a rose was not the Countess of Falcon and I answered that your Grace hadn't ordered so."

He had a cool expression on the outside but the hand holding his pen gripped it tighter.

'If you answer that way, what am I supposed to do?!'

He swallowed back the words he wanted to scream. It was moments like this where his always capable butler was instantly reduced to a tactless fool.

"Send it. The rose."

"Is your Grace talking about the Countess of Falcon?"

"Send it today. Right now."

"Yes, your Grace. Oh, and another thing—"

"Why are they so many?" Hugo mumbled gloomily.

He'd only stopped Jerome from leaving and said one thing but it seemed like Jerome had taken that opportunity to pour out one thing after the other.

"This is something that her Grace's primary doctor said. She wants you to restrain yourself in going to her Grace's bed..."

"What? Why does the doctor care about that?"

"She said it was because of her Grace's health and that once in five days, her Grace needs to rest."

The health of the wife; it was the emergence of a tough task that he couldn't resist at all. His wife was small and weak.

Truthfully, Lucia was not that fragile but in his head, it was fixed as a huge deal if she were to fall ill. And for more than one month without pause, he'd had his way with her.

Though if he could really do it for more than one round then at least it wouldn't be unfair.

Once every five days.

He became depressed.

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## Translator's Corner.

1. He means there was nothing said specifically about a yellow rose. She just said send me a rose.
2. If this sentence feels off to you, sorry. I can't really get what he's trying to say. But from what I'm hearing, basically he's saying that if she doesn't think this pile of roses is the, you know 'go away rose', he interpreted what she said differently.
3. The condition are the shields.
4. So I feel like I need to explain this. Basically it's like if her husband is back from work, to comfort him, ask him if he's tired and say he's done a great job.

## Chapter 22

### The Ducal Couple (10)

Cushioned on the finely detailed muscles of a man's body, there lay a woman's body. Leaning her head on his shoulders and placing her cheek on his upper chest, Lucia enjoyed the feeling of his hands gently caressing her naked back.

His chest was under her palm and she felt fascinated by the firmness of his skin so she put a bit of strength in her hands and poked his skin.

"Starting tomorrow, I will be away from Roam for a few days."

"Where are you going to?"

"Fiefdom inspection. I plan to look around once or twice a month from now on."

Although he had fallen for the sweet dream called the newlywed life, he had not forgotten what he needed to do.

"Does a Lord need to do that?"

"Of course. I need to maintain order."

Those people are type to look for another place to go to if they do not see their master so before that happens, he has to tighten their leash.

Although it was enjoyable to observe and pick out the fools who try to look for another place and warn or deal with them, he refrained from making such a coarse expression in front of her.

'Inspection of the fief... this is something he's originally been doing.'

Her husband in her dreams, Count Martin, had never once visited his fiefdom and as expected, Lucia had never been there either.

However from time to time, she would see people coming from the fief with tax

reports and have the report flung on their face and screamed at.

“Will it take long?”

“About three or four days. If it’s a long visit, it can take a few more days.”

‘He won’t be here for a few days.’ Lucia felt somewhat strange.

Even though she’d come to Roam right after they had gotten married and had stayed alone for nearly a month, at some point, it had become natural for her to be near him.

She wondered if she were to say, ‘Please come back soon’, if he would get annoyed.

“Your next tea party is in two days, right?”

Lucia’s second tea party was to be held two days later. It was almost half a month since her last tea party.

Because of the success of the first tea party, Lucia was looking forward to the second one, however when she thought about how he wouldn’t be around, her enthusiasm suddenly diminished.

“Yes.”

“I have something to give you. It should arrive tomorrow or the day after.”

“What is it?”

“A gift. I feel that the last tea party present was a bit lacking.”

He was speaking in a calm voice but Lucia’s heart began to throb. His unexpected and sudden gift made her heart flutter.

“Can I ask what the gift is?”

“A necklace.”

As his voice was so bland, Lucia’s heart that was throbbing in expectation cooled down slightly. It was simply a formal gift but here she was, having high expectations alone.

Lucia had yet to grasp his simple personality that had never given a gift on his own before or teased someone about a gift.

“Do you perhaps hate jewelry?”

“Is there anyone who does not like jewelry?”

“Then that’s good. Do you have any special plans for when I’m away?”

“The tea party in two days but other than that...”

“So there’s nothing in particular? Don’t think of doing anything abrupt or unexpected while I’m gone. Just stay obediently.”

“What unexpected action?”

“I’m only saying you should be as you always have. And particularly, don’t go outside.”

Lucia wondered why he would suddenly mention going out. Ever since she arrived at Roam, she had stayed without ever leaving the castle.

In the castle, everything she needed was prepared for her therefore there was no need for her to go out. And perhaps her personality was boring for she preferred a quiet and unchanging life to a dynamic one.

The entire time, she’d never told him that she wanted to go out so she couldn’t figure out why he would suddenly say something like that.

“Why?”

“Do you want to go out?”

‘Do not step outside my territory while I am gone.’ That was what he really wanted to say.

“No but you never know what could happen. You have to tell me the exact reason so I can make a decision.”

“Since I am not here in my position, my Duchess has to take care of it, right?”

He was pleased with himself for coming up with a pretty reasonable answer. It was not necessary for her to stay in Roam to take care of duties in place of him but Lucia couldn't find any gaps in his words and just thought it made sense.

"Ah, yes."

Because he hadn't said anything for a while, Lucia glanced at him and found him staring at her.

"Is there anything else you want to tell me?"

He chuckled and lowered his head, capturing her lower lips. He bit it gently then sucked on it.

His wife who listened well to his words with an innocent expression and clear eyes, was just too pretty. He was already worried about not seeing her for a few days.

Philip watched as the Duke of Taran and his knights left Roam early in the morning. His residence was at a corner in the inner part of the outer wall of Roam.

The residence of the primary doctor of the Duke was originally within the castle walls but as the owner of the Taran family changed eight years ago, Philip's residence was pushed to the outer wall.

Apart from the residence changing, the Duke did not treat him 'specially' or persecute him.

It would be more correct to say that the Duke held absolutely no interest in him. Also when Philip changed his residence, the several medical records of the house that were passed down from generation to generation were allowed to move with him.

Philip never forgot that his life was hanging on Hugo's narrow compassion. Although exactly speaking, it was more payment than it was compassion. The payment of a life debt.

Philip admired the cold-blooded duke who did not bleed nor possess tears. The surrounding people who knew the secret of the Taran family had vanished without a trace and the only one left who knew that secret was Philip but Philip had never condemned the Duke's cruelty and savagery.

The reason why Philip's family clung desperately to the Duke of Taran was because he was the Taran bloodline sculpture. A long time ago, magic was the order of the world.

At that time, the Madoh Empire ruled the world and the Madoh Empire was located at the center of their very own country, Xenon. (1)

At that time, there existed a number of ordinary humans and a few nobles who ruled over them. The nobles of the Madoh Empire did not refer to ordinary humans but another race with superior abilities.

This race had black eyes and black hair. Other than that, they didn't look much different from humans but they had abilities much superior and overwhelming to an ordinary human. The Taran family was the last trace of the Madoh Empire.



The nobles maintained their bloodlines by marrying amongst themselves. The Madoh Empire was dominated by magic and only nobility could possess magical powers.

Since the nobles were born from nobles, they had magical powers from the moment they were born. These few nobles suppressed and exploited the numerous humans.

It was as though the nobles were all born the same, for they all, without any exception, were cruel and merciless. Even if thousands of humans were to charge at one noble, they would be unable to beat the noble.

In this way, the ruling class consolidated their rule while the despair of the humans deepened and it felt like this order would never be broken.

But one day, a meteor from space crashed on the surface. It created a huge earthquake but nobody was hurt because it crashed in a place that was deserted.

A few researchers took interest in it but that interest cooled down soon enough. They ended up taking it as a memorable but worthless event.

But from that day onwards, the order of the world began to crumble. The atmosphere that was full of magical power dispersed and the magic that flowed in the blood of the nobles began to disappear making their strength plunge lower than that of criminals.



They were unable to compete against the physical strength of ordinary humans and the humans that had suffered numerous exploitations rose up and banded together.

At first, the humans were afraid but once they realized what they could do with their own strength, they turned into a terrifying insanity and the hunting began.

Nobles with black hair and black eyes were all pursued, tracked down and caught. It was to the extent that not even their shape was left as they were crushed or murdered.

All traces of the Madoh Empire was burned and destroyed. Books and items that had cost hundreds of thousands were now of no use and were reduced to rubbish. No matter where one turned their head, one could see smoke rising in the distance and the blowing ashes.

The Taran family were nobles but more precisely half-nobles. They were ostracized amongst nobles because they were labeled as heresies so they lived quietly without the usual nobility ties. They were ostracized because in the Taran ancestry, a human's blood was mixed in.

Those of the Taran bloodline were also weak in magic and were regarded as the shame of the nobles.

However, the day of the unusual event, the blood of the human that lay dormant in the Taran blood awoke and mixed with their blood or rather, it changed their body and brain, making them powerful.

Their black hair and black eyes were changed to black hair and red eyes. In a world being rampaged with the madness of the humans, the Taran brother and sister survived.

They hid themselves quietly and waited for their existence to be completely forgotten so that they could rebuild their family and preserve their bloodline.

They did not have to wait too long. The destruction of the Madoh Empire only kick-started the world of humans.

Humans who had now defeated their common enemy, started to destroy, fight amongst themselves and tear themselves apart. The losers (the nobles) disappeared quickly from their memory.

Decades later, the Madoh Empire had simply become an old story and hundred years later, it had become a myth. After a long time, the atmosphere changed again.

The magic power in the atmosphere was back and although it was not restored to the way it was before the meteor fell, it was enough for broken artifacts from the Madoh Empire to resume function.

Humans were joyous at the discovery of these Madoh treasures and began to enthusiastically excavate them and with that, treasure hunting became the most popular job.

Those of the Taran family that were in hiding, carefully and cautiously, came out of hiding.

They brought out their family artifacts that they had hidden and began rebuilding their family. It was not long before they began a charismatic and remarkable family with a lot of influence.

Philip was one of the few human descendants that had been with the family since they began to rebuild. Philip's family existed to fulfill their mission which was to preserve the Taran bloodline.

In the time of the Madoh Empire, no children would be born between a noble and a human. It was an irrelevant issue to the nobles but many researchers were curious as to why this was so.

After doing several researches, they found the method for conception.

From the standpoint of the nobles, the researchers had done something useless but in the first place, majority of the research they did was useless.

Thanks to that knowledge, the distant ancestor of the Taran family was born but even after that, they continued to be interested in this method.

They continued their research in secret and built up their knowledge. It was a bit different from common nobles for a half-noble and a human to combine and have a child.

After continuous research and trial and error, they finally found a way of keeping only the Taran bloodline. During the time of the Madoh Empire, this method was never

used. Yes, the Taran family were half-nobles but a noble was a noble.

Although the ancestry of the Taran family was mixed, apart from that instance, they did not do anything like that again.

They married full nobles to try deepen their noble blood and get back into the main circle of nobility.

When all the nobles in the world were destroyed, the Taran family was only able to continue its bloodline by marrying humans so the knowledge that was already in the family began to show its usefulness.

However, all combinations with humans always resulted in females and they needed males to continue the family.

The solution they found to this problem was closely related kin. The head of Taran took his half-sister as his wife and only one son was conceived between them. The son needed a wife to continue the family line. And it was the father's job to make a bride for the son.

It was necessary to prepare for the birth of the child (the bride) by combining with an ordinary human woman that did not possess the Taran bloodline.

For this, they needed a young female that had not yet started menstruating. When the female's menstruation began, the female would be made to take mugwort herb for more than half a year to stop it. In that state, the body is cleansed for around a year.

The male of the Taran family who would be the father of the child in the future would then take the virginity of the prepared woman. The woman would then be fed with medicine that weakened the effect of mugwort and their body would be returned to how it originally was.

The time for menstruation to restart varied from person to person; short would be one year and long would be three years.

The period until menstruation began was the time to get pregnant. He would sleep with the woman and have a child. If menstruation restarted and the woman was not yet pregnant, she was considered a failure.

Philip's family was involved with this process from beginning to end. As time passed,

this knowledge was passed down as the vision of Philip's family and the head of Taran family was told the specific contents separately.

The two families were in a mutual and inseparable relationship.

Philip had watched over the twin brothers from the moment there were born. When the Duke tried to kill one of the twins, he had dissuaded him to leave them in case of future uncertainties.

The Duke had showed cruel interest in them. Interest in how it would turn out if one grew up with the best background and the other grew up and survived in the worst of conditions.

Although the Duke did not stop his child from being sold as a slave to the mercenaries, he always watched from afar. Hugh did not know but when he was young, there were a few times Philip saved his life.

The gentle Hugo that did not inherit the brutal temperament unique to the Taran lineage and the spiteful Hugh that killed people without batting an eye.

Philip loved them both but between the two of them, his attachment to Hugh was stronger. To pass down and continue the Taran family line, human blood was mixed in so naturally, the Taran bloodline grew murky.

The people of Taran were becoming more and more human-like. In the middle of this, Hugh was born; the perfect sculpture of the Taran bloodline (1).

An outstanding body, a nimble brain, incredible mental strength, cold-blooded and ruthless. He was the perfect image of the master of Taran that they had wished for.

The former Duke was the same in that he liked the abandoned son more and he connived to switch them again. However, he was opposed to killing off Hugo.

He had some affection for Hugo but the main reason was that it was unprecedented for twins to be born in the Taran family. He did not want to throw him (Hugo) away that easily.

However, it was impossible to predict the future. He did not know that some way or the other, Hugo would meet Hugh and learn how to read into the actions of people.

He did not know that because they did not know about the existence of the other, the two brothers would meet for the first time in ten years and end up regarding each other as existences more precious than life itself rather than as enemies.

Compared to his predecessors who were cruel but coolheaded, the dead Duke of Taran was full of greed. He was different from the other masters of Taran.

The Duke did not forget his mission to make a remarkable child and continue the family line but he did not want to lose the absolute power he enjoyed while he was alive. Greed always led one to downfall.

At the time, it was Hugo's Taran but as Hugh survived and persisted alone, Philip could see hatred and disillusionment in his eyes. Philip could sense that he would soon disassemble the family and break it into pieces.

If Damian did not exist, Hugh would definitely have done that. It saddened Philip to see him one day, walk to the end of the world without having given his heart to someone.

Philip would never admit it nor would he be believed but he loved Hugo. For the Philip that had no family, the twin brother were like his grandchildren.

[I'm warning you now but don't you dare try approaching my wife]

And that was why he could not forget the way Hugo looked in that instant. It was momentary but he could feel vigilance and protection from him.

It was neither empty threats nor intimidation but the feeling of a mother trying to protect her child. It was the first time Philip had seen him fixated on someone other than the dead Hugo.

'What kind of person is she?'

It was just pure curiosity. He wasn't thinking of doing anything nor could he do anything. He just wanted to know how the Duchess looked and what her character was like.

He wondered if it would be possible to leave once the Duke left the premises but as soon as he approached the door to the castle, a man appeared out of nowhere and blocked him.

“I will be troubled if you were to go in, Sir Philip.”

Philip let out a low sigh. He did not know someone was watching him.

“Are you monitoring me?”

“As long as you do not enter the castle, your actions will remain unrestricted.”

“Just why? What is the reason?”

“I do not know any reasons. I just follow my orders. If there are any protests, I have been given permission to get physical.”

“...I understand.”

Philip went back quietly. He sat facing the castle walls and licked his lips then he looked to the sky and mumbled bitterly.

‘Do I have to leave again...?’

He never stayed in one place for too long because his heart was never attached to it. It was his wish to meet Damian once in his life, but he had tried before and failed.

The Duke would never give Philip the opportunity. Perhaps the Duke wouldn’t even tell Damian the secret of the family and would keep it all to himself.

‘Is it an obsession?’

He had to agree that the desire of his family and their hanging onto the bloodline of Taran was an obsession. Philip’s father, grandfather, and the ones before his grandfather were the same way.

It was not that easy to change the idea which he had been infatuated with since childhood till he was an old man.

He probably would still be unable to let go of this attachment even when he was on his death bed and closed his eyes for the last time.

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## Translator's Corner:

1. It reads perfect crystal but I think sculpture is more representative of what the author is talking about. I also edited the previous chapter a bit because I got confused when crystal came outta nowhere. Context, baby.

## Chapter 23

### The Ducal Couple (11)

Jerome placed a large box wrapped in luxurious velvet on the table. Lucia slowly opened the box with an expectant mind.

“Huk!”

The maid next to her, peeking from the corner of her eye let out a gasped and exclaimed in surprise. It was not just the maid, Lucia was just as surprised.

Inside the box was a dazzling, gorgeous looking white diamond necklace with countless diamonds hanging from it. Lucia did not really know the price of jewelry but this could not be simple jewelry, it was a treasure.

Were diamonds common gems? Normal necklaces would have a diamond present in the middle of it, resting on the breastbone, connected to a thin gold string. The diamond would just be an accessory to the rest of the necklace.

For this necklace, the main character of the necklace was a huge diamond that made her suspicious if it was really a diamond or just a piece of glass.

She had never seen anything like it before. She could guess that even if one of the noble ladies owned something like this, they would be too afraid and wouldn't dare to have it on their necks when they are going out.

She hesitated, wondering in her heart if she should dare touch it then carefully approached and took the necklace in both of her hands. She almost missed its heavy weight the moment it touched her hands.

“Wear it and see, your Grace.”

A maid brought a full-length mirror as Lucia grew more delighted. She fastened the necklace and stood in front of the mirror.



The weight of the necklace made her feel as though someone was pushing down on her neck with two hands. Her entire neckline was densely covered with sparkling diamonds.

“It looks really good on you, your Grace.”

Jerome was pleased and lavished her with compliments.

“Just what... is this?”

The necklace she was expecting was a cute or common female ornament not a rare item that seemed to have come from the royal treasury.

“Did he really buy this? As a present for me?”

“His Grace regrets that it took more time than he thought for the gift to arrive. He wanted to give you before he departed for the inspection.”

“This... this is pretty excessive.”

Jerome was bewildered by Lucia’s reluctant response.

“It is not excessive, your Grace.”

“If the recipient feels burdened, then it is an excessive gift. Jerome, if... I were to tell his Grace that I feel burdened, would he be upset?”

“Yes.” Jerome replied firmly.

He had watched as his master chose this gift with quite the happy expression. It was the first time that his master had personally chosen a gift for a woman.

In the past, he would only ask Jerome to pay for whatever item the woman wanted.

Jerome did not know if he would make a mistake talking about his master’s past relationships so he didn’t say anything. He was specially watching his mouth as he had been pretty careless in the past because of her Grace’s inquires.

“You do not have to feel burdened, your Grace. From his Grace’s standpoint, it is not an excessive gift at all.”

‘My master is wealthy’ was what Jerome was trying to say that but Lucia took the meaning of his words a bit differently. That buying this gift was of the same significance to him as buying a hair comb.

Lucia sat in the living room alone as she starred at the box which contained the necklace and fell into deep thought. She was trying to analyze just what underlying meaning lay behind the gift.

‘It could just be a simple present to celebrate my first tea party. Since he’s rich, it may not be any different from giving a small ring as gift.’

That was her first theory but Lucia didn’t know that no matter how rich he was, that present was not something he would gift with a light heart.

He was only able to acquire it by asking around and even paying a premium on it as the necklace was already won by a royal in another country in a jewelry auction.

Money was money but his efforts were clear. He wanted to give her a special gift. But because he gave the gift in such a simple manner, a small misunderstanding was created.

‘Or... is it for a reward? Since he likes to sleep with me...’

That was her second theory. However the idea of giving her body and being paid like a prostitute made her feel terrible all over.

‘Then, is it something like a habit? He has a lot of lovers so it could just be a routine to give gifts to women.’

That was her third theory. This theory was the same as the last in that it made her feel terrible. Nevertheless, the first theory was the easiest to swallow.

She dug through her head but she couldn't think of any more theories. She excluded the theory that it could be a present carrying a special meaning. Lucia sighed heavily.

The gift, so precious that it was a bit difficult to bear, was like a stone thrown into her tranquil and asleep heart, causing a ripple. Her marriage life with him was very different from her expectations. She had expected it to be dreary but it was full of joy and happiness.

He never said unkind or sugar-coated words but still, he was affectionate. He was not snappy nor did he ever say anything that would hurt her feelings and he was not as scary or as ridiculously violent as the rumors had made him out to be.

'I already promised. I said I would not fall in love with him.'

But her heart kept wavering. Even though she tried to control her heart, telling it, 'you can't,' every time he laughed mischievously, every time his arms were wrapped tightly around her waist and every time his lips heatedly met hers, her heart shook like a reed.

She blamed him inwardly as she stared at the necklace box.

'Why are you doing this? Making someone feel weird for no reason.'

The sound in her chest was deafening, but still, she had been enduring well till now. She was scared that she would one day, without even realizing it herself, cling to his trousers like a leech and then one day, receive a bunch of yellow roses.

Simply imagining it was awful.

He was a courteous and refined nobleman therefore he was just treating her with manners befitting to Lucia's status as his wife. It would be troublesome if she were to misunderstand his kindness.

He didn't seem to dislike her and she knew for sure he liked her body but that was just

interest due to physical desire.

‘Come to your senses.’

She took a deep breath.

‘The way you have been till now is just right. Do not waver. Your heart should be made of stone. I can stay with him the way I have been till now.’

It was still okay. Until now, it was still ok.



Lucia was wrapping up her second tea party after having an enjoyable time. She had invited only unmarried young noble women for this tea party. A red-haired lady sat in her seat till the end, then walked up to Lucia.

“I am Kate Milton, I greeted you earlier. My grand aunt has told me a lot about you. Ah, The Countess of Corzan is my grandaunt.”

“Ah, I remember now. That day, Madam Michelle boasted of her niece and told me her niece would make a good companion.”

“Are you talking about my grandaunt? That is bit hard to believe. Whenever she sees me, she raises her eyebrows and gives me a fierce look.”

“I’m sure that’s just her showing her affection, Lady Milton. She also emphasized that if Lady Milton does not like me, it would be impossible for us to be friends.”

“In any case, that’s just how my grandaunt is. Now, although I am not sure if I want to have a troublemaker like you as a friend but if by any chance, someone is saying that we should be friends, then I oblige and prostrate myself.” [Kate]

The two women’s eyes met and they both burst into laughter. Kate’s open-minded words really matched her personality as she gave hearty laughter and extended her right hand.

“Please, call me Kate.”

It was Lucia's first time seeing a noble lady offering a handshake as a greeting. Seeing Lucia's look of surprise, Kate was startled and withdrew her hand.

"This... apologies. I was disrespectful. It is a habit I have been unable to fix even after my grand aunt's scolding."

Lucia chuckled and stretched out her hand. She liked this cheerful and straight forward lady from the get-go. Kate smiled and held Lucia's hand.

"Call me by name, too." [Lucia]

'Vivian.' She was hesitant to say that name.

As Hugo kept calling her by that name this entire time, she had grown familiar with it and the sense of rejection she had in the past was pretty much gone but she was still uncomfortable with the name. A friend calling her by that name somehow made her feel like she was concealing the real her from the get-go.

"Lucia. Call me Lucia. It is my name from my childhood."

The two of them quickly became friends shortly after they had met. Kate liked the feminine Duchess and Lucia liked the energetic and cheerful Kate. They both found parts that were missing from themselves in the other.

Afterwards, Kate would often visit the Roam Castle, to chat, have some tea and then leave. Kate was two years older than Lucia and Lucia was complete charmed with the first friend she'd made. It took less than ten days for the two of them to become close friends.

"Could it be that his Grace does not like you going out?" [Kate]

"Ha-ha. It's not like that. He's not that type of person." [Lucia]

If Hugo were here, he would have immediately replied that he didn't like it. Hugo didn't control her movement; going out or not; because there was no reason to. There was no need to tell someone who always stayed within the castle to not leave the castle

walls.

“Don’t you get frustrated just staying in Roam?”

“It’s okay. I open a tea party sometimes and just like now, you come to see me pretty often.”

“Ah, don’t be like that, do you want to learn horseback riding? When I take a swift horse ride, I feel all my frustrations dissipating.”

Kate wanted to let the extremely reserved Lucia learn the pleasures of outdoor activity. The world was vast and there were many ways to enjoy oneself.

“Horseback riding? Isn’t that dangerous?”

“Not at all. You’ll know when you see but they are no animals as mild as them. Of course, it can be a bit fast paced in the beginning but as you continually ride, you will grow more familiar. Ah, it is also a good exercise for the body shape. These days, it is the latest trend among women.”

“Is that so...?” Lucia mulled over it for a moment then replied. “I’ll have to receive permission from his Grace.”

“Ahh... okay.”



As she stroked his face, her hand trembled, falling, so she tried to hold onto his shoulders but her hands slipped on his sweat and fell to the bed. It wasn’t only her hands as her whole body trembled and quivered in ecstasy.

The man groaned and thrust into her. At the peak of his pleasure, he twitched violently inside her, wrenching himself out and released.

“Ung... Hk!” (gasps)

Her moist eyes filled up like that of an overflowing fountain and her tears poured down her face. She could not focus with the waves of euphoric pleasure passing through her body.

She felt as though she were floating in the air and then suddenly sank down, falling to somewhere unknown, like she was falling endlessly to her death.

He grunted fiercely, grabbing her buttocks with both of his hands, and entering into her soaked insides. He went a bit slowly, his sensitive part brushing slightly against her moist flesh as if to feel it out.

He moved slowly, moved a bit faster, then moved slowly again, enticing her as he riled her up.

Her insides squeezed and clenched on him, as if it was furiously resisting his invasion. Her exterior was honest as it spasmed, letting him know that her body was approaching its climax. He pierced deeply into her highly sensitive insides with his member.

“Uuck... Hugh... please...”

Lucia implored him as she whimpered. He was moving much harder and rougher than before. All her energy had been squeezed out and she couldn’t summon any power.

Her entire body was more sensitive so his hands simply sweeping across her skin caused her to ache in excitement.

“Huuu..... what do you want me to do?” (Hugo)

He shifted a little more weight down and thrust in heavily. His rock-hard penis was not even slightly softer and the movement of his member deep inside of her was also tireless.

As the sexual organs of both of them met, the excitement from the movement and the pleasure that accompanied it were delivered to both parties without delay. But, although Hugo could handle it, Lucia could not.

“Hk! Ahh! No! Stop!”

Hugo looked at the woman who was squirming underneath his body. Her pupils were wide looking somewhat fearful and her eyelashes were wet. He lowered his head and licked the tears that had just fallen out of her eyes.

He captured her slightly open red lips and as he sucked on it, he wove his tongue into

the open mouth. It was a short kiss and his tongue lightly caressed the inside of her mouth. Then he started kissing her again.

He suckled, licked, caressed and bit her lips. It was a passionate kiss that did not hide his tender but explicit desire.

“Should I stop?”

Even though he was saying that, he once again pushed inside of her. He was quickly wrapped in her innermost flesh and his breathing grew irregular.

“Hng... yes...”

“Alright.”

Instantly, her teary eyes grew slightly round. The corners of his eyes curved and he laughed lazily.

“Just a little bit more.”

Of course, she should have expected it. She was once again deceived. She felt so wronged that she began to sob.

‘This is dangerous.’

Even though he mumbled that, his facial expression was full of hunger and greed, like that of a hungry beast in front of its prey. As the rims of her eyes grew redder, she began to wriggle around and his lower body immediately reacted.

She felt his provoked member grow more aroused as blood rushed towards it and it became stiffer. When he reached deep inside of her, she frowned and tightly closed her eyes.

He laughed contentedly as he observed her reaction that was extremely cute to the extent he wanted to eat up her lips.

He thrust into her, hitting a spot that he knew she liked, causing her body to shudder and she let out a coquettish moan. The words to put an end to it were at the tip of his tongue but her moan was too much stimulation.



“Just one more time.”

She panted as she looked at him suspiciously with her wet eyes.

‘I won’t be deceived this time.’ Was what her eyes were saying. Although it was fun when he led the sex and ate her up when she grumbled and said no, this was really the last time. Her flavor when she tenderly enticed and actively reacted to him was also special.

“You really promised.”

Her eyes appeared very docile. It happened every time but then she would think maybe this time. She had repeated the same mistake more than she could count. She gave him a small nod and the corners of his mouth went up.

‘Ah, really. So cute.’ [Hugo]

“Lie on your stomach and lift your butt to me.” [Hugo]

Her body flinched as his warm member that was wrapped inside of her was swiftly pulled out. She hesitated for a moment looking at his enthusiasm that seemed like it would never end, then obediently turned around and lay on her stomach.

Her white and plump buttocks was distorted in his grasp. He appreciated her appetizing curves that started from her back to her waist, leading to her butt then swiftly thrust into her from behind. Her body instantly trembled intensely.

“Hnnng...”

“Hk! Haa... really. I’m going crazy.”

He couldn’t get enough of her taste no matter how many time he experienced it. Far from getting tired of it, every time he embraced her, it always felt fresh.

This woman with such a heavenly taste was his. Nobody was allowed to touch her.

If he could, he would engrave a sign on every part of her body to show that she was his. Lately, whenever he looked at her, in the depth of his eyes, there was a dangerous and possessive aura.

It was a secret and silent darkness that he would never reveal to her.

# Chapter 24

## The Ducal Couple (12)

He gently and softly kissed every corner of her face while his hand slowly moved up and down, from her back to her waist.

While he was languidly engrossed in afterplay, a thought came to her mind and she abruptly burst into laughter.

“Hugh, you know, Lady Milton who came this afternoon said something funny.”

“Lady Milton... ah, you mean the daughter of the Baron of Milton.”

The Baron of Milton was a vassal to the duke, a rigid and upright man. It was recognized that he educated his children to emulate his righteous character so he had allowed the daughter of Milton and his wife to interact more frequently. He wanted her life in the north to be enjoyable.

“Yes, she asked if you possibly wouldn’t let me go outside.”

His hand which was caressing her back paused for a moment. Lucia chuckled and continued speaking, not noticing.

“I told her that wasn’t how it was, so she asked me to go horse riding with her.”

Faraway.

“Horse riding?”

“Lady Milton says it’s fun and is a sport. May I learn?”

“...It sounds dangerous.”

“It isn’t that dangerous. She said a lot of women do it.”

“Do you really want to learn?”

He did not like it. He had seen in the past how the appearance of women going riding and then panting afterwards would capture the eyes of men. It was also quite the sight to see a woman in riding clothes these days.

There was nothing more indecent than the way it clung tightly and revealed the body.

In the past, he was no different from other men, in that he thought that it was nice to look at plus he was never one to care for a woman or distinguish who he spent on but that was already a thing of the past.

He never clung to trivial things of the past.

“I can’t?”

Lucia placed her cheek on his chest and pitifully blinked her eyes. In that moment, he barely managed to stop himself from saying that she could do whatever she wanted.

He did not want her to go horse riding. He could not bear to see foolish men leering at her but this was her first request to him since they had gotten married. He didn’t want to see her disappointed look if he refused.

‘A riding place that only women are allowed in... I don’t think there is any place like that in Roam... Then, I’ll use this opportunity and make one.’

There was no such place, not only in Roam but in the entire Xenon. This was the moment when the only women-only equestrian (horse-riding) practice field was formed.

The place, which would serve as an important venue for social activities of women in northern high society in the distant future, began with a man’s unwillingness for his wife to be seen.

“Okay. Only if you promised to learn within the castle until you can safely ride to some extent.”

He would make the practice field while she was learning to ride and he expected to take about a week or so.

If that wasn't enough time, he would ask her riding teacher to hold her back for a few more days. Or course, he also had get a horse riding teacher. A female horse riding teacher.

“Yes. So you are giving permission, right?”

“Be careful so you don't get hurt.”

“I'll be careful! Thank you!”

She threw her arms around his neck and hugged him. Her concern that he would not allow her was merely just that. He was a reasonable person.

Holding her in his arms, he recalled a while ago when he had gifted her an expensive necklace. For the first time ever, he had painstakingly chosen a gift for a woman.

He did not know what she liked exactly, but he knew from experience that women loved jewelry so his choice was jewelry. But he didn't want give her just anything.

The Lady of Taran definitely had to have something special. So, he collected information sheets shared among the jewelers to find something special.

But when he found something he wanted, it already had an owner. Once something entered his sight, he was never one to change his mind.

He did not care about how much it was so he sent a negotiator to unconditionally conclude the deal. It took far longer than he had expected for the gift to get to his hands.

His original plan was to gift it and then leave for the inspection but eventually he did not get to see her expression when she received it.

However, he had high expectations of his return. He expected that she would be thrilled with the gift and knew that she would give him a grand welcome on his return.

She had thanked him but her somewhat perfunctory “thank you” did not meet his expectations. She had thanked him, given him a soft smile and greeted him respectfully and he could sense it was not heartfelt but there was nothing to nitpick at.

He felt a bit hurt and embarrassed at the same time.

‘Just why? Wasn’t it a natural reaction for women’s eyes to shine like jewels when they receive jewelry?’

He had put so much care into choosing the gift but she didn’t like it, making him wonder just how great it would have to be to satisfy her. But then, Jerome’s words were surprising.

[She said it was burdensome.]

It was his first time hearing those words after giving such a present. Did he have to meet a certain burden level? He was given something new to worry about.

However, her response from simply being allowed to go riding was more passionate than when she had received the diamond necklace.

This was the heartfelt gratitude and thankfulness he had expected. The diamond necklace he had spent a fortune on did not measure up to approval for horse riding.

‘So, money was a no.’

It was a little disheartening as he had once had an idea similar to that. Perhaps that idea would have cost more than what it took to acquire the necklace and build a horse-riding practice field. In his account, the expense was not an expense.

Although he’d solved the problem of horse riding, his honest heart always wanted her to be within his sight.

He was slightly annoyed at the daughter of Baron Milton who put useless ideas in his wife’s head but thanks to her, he knew a bit more about what Lucia liked so it was not entirely bad.



Around the time that the equestrian practice field was completed, Lucia was babbling on by the bedside.

“Hugh, I heard that if you head a bit to the east of Roam, there is a pretty large lake.”

“Hmmm it is quite big. Do you want to go see it?”

He had been thinking of making time one day to go out with her and come back.

“I was told there is a boat ride around this time. There are a lot of nobles that have a small boat, do you have one?”

“...I don’t.”

He had never done something like a boat ride. He didn’t have any memories of pertaining in such entertainment.

He had probably heard about it but because he wasn’t interested, he would forget about it.

He didn’t understand how it could be pleasurable to sit in a boat and float on water so he took it as something that men and women, who had nothing to do with their time, would do.

‘I should buy a boat.’

He had already forgotten his past self.

He never clung to trivial things of the past.

“Then... since Lady Milton invited me to it, can I go?”

Again, it was the daughter of Baron Milton. He had a bad feeling about all future association with the lady of Milton at the center.

“It is dangerous, isn’t it?”

“I was told there hasn’t been any accidents in the boat ride. Lady Milton confidently

told me that the boat owned by the Milton family is very strong.”

“When is the date of the boat ride?”

“It’s in four days.”



An unexpected notice flew in for the Milton Baron from the Duke’s manor. He read it and inclined his head. Nothing had happened recently so he wondered what this was about.

He suddenly remembered that his youngest daughter had said she was going to be boating a few days later and was taking a boat out of the warehouse.

“You called, Father.”

“Yes. A notice came down from his Lordship’s manor and I think you should see it.”

Kate received the document from her father and read it.

“...regulation of customs? Just what does this mean?”

“Well, I do not know exactly what the Lord is doing too but in conclusion he will be controlling the boating on the lake. There won’t be much difference from the past, just that I will need to specify a date for only women on the lake and also control access to the vicinity of lake. I personally don’t have any problem with it. Any parent with a daughter would like it. When did you say you were going boating?”

“In three days.”

The Baron of Milton knew that lately, his daughter was a conversation partner for the Duchess but he didn’t know the exact details.

He did not know that they were close enough to call each other by their names, that Kate was very eager to get Lucia to go out and play, or that she would take Lucia for the boat ride.



As expected, Kate did not inform her family since it was obvious that they would be full of all kinds of worries.

“Oh, the control date is the same, in three days. Anyways, it won’t be affecting you going to play but I’m just telling to so that you know. I ask just in case but you weren’t planning on seeing any silly boys, right?”

“It’s nothing like that.”

Kate walked out of her Father’s office and began muttering.

“...this... what...”

She was going to go boating with the Duchess in three days. Was this simply a coincidence? She didn’t think so.

She’d thought something was strange ever since the women-only horse riding was made.

‘No way... is Lucia being confined?’

But there was no sign of that on the Duchess’ face. She didn’t seem to be living under oppression.

The expression of the Duchess when she had laughed and smilingly said that the Duke had readily agreed to her going horse-riding was not faked or unnatural.

A smile gradually crept onto the face of Kate who was pondering over this.

‘Somehow... this is a little exciting.’



It was a few days after the pleasant boat ride.

“Hugh, Lady Milton dropped by today.”

‘That woman again’. Hugo frowned slightly at the mention of this woman he had never seen.

His strange ominous foreboding was proven right. The daughter of the Baron of Milton had given him a significant headache. Now it wasn't just a feeling but a fact.

"She said there is a fox hunt."

Fox hunting. The playing of those girls in the name of hunting was blasphemy against hunting itself.

Some chap would catch a fox, tame it and then release it into the forest to hunt for rabbits and it was doubtful if the girls could even touch the dead rabbit.

"There is a regular gathering for fox hunting and I don't have a fox but I want to watch it. Lady Milton told me she has a fox she's raised and she could show me how to do it."

"What will you do if you meet dangerous wild animals in the forest?"

"There is a small community in the forest not too far from the lake, so there are no dangerous animals at all. The biggest carnivore there would be the fox."

He could get an idea of where she meant from what she was saying. There was a small forest that formed a community, as though someone had planted a handful of seedlings, separating it from other places.

If it was just that wide, he could surround it and control the area. He definitely had to see how the fox hunt operated and also it was safer for her to go amongst only women.

"I can't?"

Her pitiful look attack was getting stronger day by day.

"...You can go."

"...Hugh, about Lady Milton."

He was enjoying touching her soft skin but his forehead wrinkled in response.

'What is it this time?'

Every time that name came out of her mouth, he felt like he had neurosis.

“What?”

“Her birthday is in three days and she is throwing a party at her house. May I attend? It is a small gathering and she’s only inviting close friends.”

‘She’s going out too often these days.’ It was all because of that tomboyish daughter of the Milton Baron.

Kate Milton was the only daughter amongst many sons in the Baron household. She was their daughter born after four sons and the Baron of Milton loved her wholeheartedly.

Kate was mixed in with four boys due to her father’s leniency with her and became famous for her tomboyish ways. It was rumored that the Baron of Milton was now troubled due to his over-indulgence.

There was no reason for Hugo to be so interested in knowing about the daughter of his vassal but the problem was that she had become a friend of his wife.

Unlike the gentle Lucia, Kate was very active and she was eager to involve Lucia in her activities.

“Why do you have to go to celebrate her birthday?”

“It’s more that I want to visit my friend’s home rather than having to celebrate her birthday.”

Since she wanted to go, she started her pitiful look attack. Hugo who unfortunately couldn’t tear the Lady Milton off from Lucia, felt the back of his head ache.

Still, the birthday party was better compared to events in the past. Since it was a place for only women, he candidly approved.

“Alright, go.”

“And... after the birthday party ends, there is a night party too...”

‘Fucking Lady Milton. Of course, there’s one’. Hugo hurled curses inwardly. Every time he saw the baron, it was at the tip of his tongue to tell the Baron to make sure his daughter stays away from his wife.

No matter how unhappy he was, as Kate hadn't caused any harm, he couldn't find any reason to do so.

Moreover, the Baron of Milton was a very loyal vassal. He did not want to deprive Lucia of the pleasure of meeting with her friend.

"Can I sleep there for a day?" (Lucia)

"You are a married woman. Are you saying you will be staying overnight?"

"...as expected, I can't do that, right? I will just attend the party and come back."

She said sulkily and readily gave up. She did not pester him about it anymore. Her bedside behavior went in a completely different direction from his predictions.

She had never once pressed him for a gift, advocated or slandered someone but it only made his head hurt more. He'd rather she asked for jewelry. Or go shopping. He had already stopped himself from saying these words he wanted to say several times.

"I will send you in a carriage so return in the morning."

He released a small sigh and gave his consent.

"I will do that! Do you really agree?!"

"Does leaving your husband alone make you that excited?"

More strength was put into his arms around her waist as they tightened around her and Lucia peeked at him, studying his eyes.

"It's only one day... you left for three to four days for your fiefdom inspection."

"That is different."

"...not really."

Hugo abruptly caught her pouting lips, biting them. He held the startled and moving chin of hers tightly and pushed his tongue deep into her small mouth. As he rampaged all over her lips and released them, her face flushed and her eyes grew misty.

He turned her body to one side, hugged her body, placed his lips on her neck and began licking her neck extensively while grabbing her bosom.

“Ah!”

“As the days go by, your retorts are increasing. Aren’t you a virtuous wife that believes her husband’s words are like the sky?”

“Ung... but...”

“But what?”

“I was told it’s not attractive... if I behave too virtuously.”

His forehead creased slightly. But still, he had noticed that the frequency of her sharp retorts had recently increased and had to wonder where she heard the nonsense advice that she now had in her head.

“Are you learning seduction techniques?”

“Tech- it’s not a technique.”

“And who is this teacher of yours?”

“...Lady Milton...”

‘Ah... really that damn Lady Milton.’

“The teacher and the student is reversed, isn’t it? The daughter of the Baron of Milton is still unmarried.”

“Lady Milton is a charming lady so I wanted to learn...”

The red-haired Kate was a woman that exuded a charm completely opposite from

Lucia. She had energetic features, a confident voice, a captivating presence while carrying a conversation and was never attracted by the courtship of men.

Lucia was envious of all of that. Kate had parents who gave her unsparingly and protective older brothers. She had everything that Lucia did not have.

“Who is learning from who? You are a Duchess. You are at the peak of the northern social status.”

He lay Lucia on her side and embrace her from behind. He kneaded her chest while roughly inserting his center in between her legs and rubbing on her butt.

“It is good to meet up but I absolutely refuse for you to learn the tomboyish ways of the Milton Baron’s daughter. So my wife, don’t lose your virtuousness or I will give you a curfew.” (1)

From behind, he slowly opened her up as his hard penis pushed against her and finally entered. Lucia’s buttocks and his thighs were tightly pressed together. The two bodies became one.

Lucia was the most ecstatic when he began to push his full length inside of her. The feeling of him inside her gave her a sense of satisfaction.

“Unng...”

“You’re doing well. Just continue doing what you’ve been doing.”

“Okay...”

Hugo had no intention of tolerating even the slightest deviation for his wife. In his eyes, she was very gentle and sweet.

Whenever he laid his eyes on her, the peace and comfort that was there, was increasingly captivating to him.

He lifted his upper body and thrust in repeatedly. It wasn’t a position that

penetrated her deeply but he knew that she secretly enjoyed this position and that was because it was less powerful and moderately stimulating.

He pulled out shortly and she let out a moan as she gasped for breath.

Summer was coming to an end.

# Chapter 25

## The Ducal Couple (13)

Jerome prepared a cup of afternoon tea as he did every day and went into the Duke's office.

To avoid disturbing his master who was currently engrossed in his work, Jerome tried to leave the tea and leave but the desk was covered in documents and the person supposed to be there could not be seen.

As this was more or less a regular thing these days, Jerome shifted his gaze in the direction he expected his master to go and as expected, the balcony window was slightly open.

He went closer to take a look and he could see the back of a tall man, leaning against the handrail.

These days the duke would start work in the afternoon and then lazy around; something he had never done before.

He would spend a long time standing there and looking down the balcony.

And below was the beautiful picture of her Grace who had recently taken to diligently growing colorful flowers in the garden.

Her Grace frequently went out to personally examine the flowers in the garden and his master would watch her.

Jerome had initially thought that his master's honeymoon phase would be briefly interesting but now he knew it wasn't.

If there was a case where the prodigal son marries and starts to change and become a reliable person, then that was practically his master.

This was why one had to live long in this world. Jerome wondered if his master knew that when he was with her, it was as though nothing else was visible, as his gaze was



locked onto her.

Surprisingly, her Gracelacee did not seem conscious of his master's intense and straight-forward gaze. It would seem that her Grace was unexpectedly insensitive.

There was something delicate between the two of them. Obviously, their relationship was good. Her Grace would give his master a pure smile, and his frigid master would warm up when her Grace was around.

Nonetheless, undeniably there was somewhat of an invisible thin wall between them. It was too ambiguous to criticize and he couldn't speak out hastily on something vague.

It was a new routine to p a brief report on what her Grace did or who she met on his master's desk so Jerome couldn't postpone his report anymore. Even more so because it was related to the health of her Grace.

Jerome hesitated a little then approached the balcony.

"Your Grace."

"Mmm."

"I have something to tell you about her Grace."

At those words, Hugo turned his head. He stared at Jerome then walked past him and went inside. But even after waiting a while, he didn't hear Jerome speaking. Hugo could tell that Jerome was being hesitant.

"What's so difficult? Talk."

"...Her Grace has never had her monthly guest." (1).

Lucia had a promise with Jerome that she would tell the Duke about her body condition together with Jerome.

But as time passed, Lucia was still the same, keeping her mouth shut. Jerome considered that she had forgotten so he reminded her but her Grace had only said that she understood and went back to being silent.

Jerome knew that interfering in this could be exceeding his authority but it was also the task of the steward to take care of his master's health.

Jerome worried several times if he should urge her Grace even if it was forcibly, to personally tell his master but eventually he decided to tell his master personally.

"Monthly guest?"

"The thing that women go through every month..."

"Ah. Continue."

Hugo was familiar with the common knowledge of women's physiological parts but the rest was sleeping at the bottom of his mind.

He had never been with a woman long enough for her to have her period. Moreover, he had never been worried about a woman getting pregnant so he really hadn't thought about it.

"At first, a maid was concerned as to whether or not her Grace was pregnant but then she was looked at by the family doctor who said that she wasn't pregnant. According to her Grace, she's never had a monthly guest and she also refused to be looked at by the doctor for treatment. She said it was something that your Grace already knew about so there was no need for it."

"She isn't pregnant so is it something serious if she isn't menstruating?"

"It is not normal, after all, it would be impossible for her Grace to get pregnant. Her Grace has to have a medical examination for us to know for sure."

"What does she mean that I already knew..."

[I cannot have a child.]

Hugo furrowed his brows.

"Ha."

He gave a forced laugh. She had definitely said that. Originally, it wasn't something one could easily say but she had simply said that she couldn't have a child as though it was

trivial. She had also given a small laugh.

To her, her inability to be pregnant was not a big deal because she couldn't have a baby anyways. She had spoken like she was telling a big secret but he had simply thought it was interesting.

"Right. I knew about it."

His head ached like it had been hit with a blunt weapon. There was an uncomfortable twisting in his stomach and he felt an anger within him that he didn't know what for, couldn't explain it or even give a reason for it.

"What is the doctor doing?"

"It isn't an external disease so if her Grace doesn't speak about it, the doctor cannot diagnose it."

"Call her now."

"...Yes, your Grace."

Jerome could see that his master's mood had soured so he immediately went away without saying a word.

While standing still, Hugo suppressed his anger and clenched his fists tightly. He then tried to calmly think of where his displeasure was coming from.

She was very much the ideal wife he wanted. She controlled the servants moderately well and did not give him any issues. He had nothing to complain about nor was he uncomfortable.

Recently, she'd had a lot of requests but it was different from the bothersome requests he was expecting.

"Ha, dammit."

He gave a heavy sigh, cupped his head in his hands and sat on the sofa. This wasn't normal.

He realized he still had no idea about what she was thinking. All he knew about his

wife was what was written in the few reports Fabian gave him.

Their relationship was good. As least he thought so. Their conversations were fun and in the bedroom, they were passionate. But they had never really *talked*.

Had she ever exposed herself to him? He seemed to have misunderstood that she'd exposed all of her heart to him since she smiled so purely.

Something suddenly came to mind so he called for Jerome and ordered him to bring the details of her spending.

Jerome soon returned with the documents.

"What of the doctor?"

"I sent someone to call her."

"I'll be coming along for the examination."

"Yes, your Grace."

As he flipped through the documents and checked the details, his eyes grew cold. Apart from the cost of decorating the garden and the cost of throwing a tea party a few times, there was no other history of personal use.

"Has she ever called for a tailor or a jeweler?"

"She hasn't."

"Even though she has thrown a few tea parties and gone outdoors several times?"

"There are dresses that were used by former Duchesses of the family and the ornaments that are passed down in the Taran family. The dresses were chosen, mended then worn while the ornaments were returned to the storage room after use."

He knit his brow tightly. It was a feeling he couldn't explain. He was angry but he couldn't explain exactly why he was angry.

'Wasn't this what you wanted?'

Those words echoed in his head.

It was.

He married what he had hoped for. A doll-like wife that would only keep her seat as the Duchess.

He needed the status and for that he needed to marry but husbandly duties were troublesome so, he made a deal. It was a contract.

A contract beneficial to both of them. She had said from that start that what she needed was the title of the Duchess.

Of course, he had thought that she wanted the wealth and power that came with being a Duchess.

It was not very long since they had been married but he knew now. From the beginning, she was not interested in it.

So what exactly was making him so unhappy? Why should it matter if she didn't want power or wealth? There was nothing for him to lose.

Rather, he should have a toast to this overwhelmingly favorable contract. But he continued to agonize about it.

He wanted to know exactly why he was in such a foul mood. He was feeling as though the ground supporting his feet had collapsed. He felt desperate, he felt anxious. But he didn't know why he was desperate or anxious.

When he was about to descend into his thoughts again, he heard Jerome's voice.

"The doctor is waiting."

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Translator's Corner:

1. So, there are two words that can be used for menstruation/period. The one here translates directly to monthly guest but it seems more like a formal way of saying it.



The garden was full of floral scents. Lucia walked in the space in the garden then would stand still and close her eyes, the scent seemingly intoxicating.

These days, her biggest job was gardening but she did not personally do any labor. The gardener took care of everything.

Lucia simply made the choice on what flowers to plant, checked if they were doing well and wandered around.

However, even though they did all the work, people would flatter her. It was a bit funny at times.

Looking at the sky, the sun had already gone down and was making shadows. She turned her gaze towards his office.

‘Ah... he isn’t there.’

He was definitely standing there a while ago. His intense gaze on her neck was embarrassing but when it disappeared, she felt disappointed.

It was a complicated feeling.

He often took a break from work to rest in the balcony and Lucia often went into the garden because she wanted to see him.

Her ‘examining the flowers’ was a pretty good excuse. Majority of the time that she saw him was limited to the evenings. It was only around this time that she could see him for an extra moment.

Although they lived in the same place, he was usually far from her reach as he was really busy. Jerome had informed her that he was buried in a pile of paperwork.

He was very diligent lord that would hold a half-a-day meetings with his vassals every three to four days and did not forget to inspect his fief.

Count Martin only knew how to show his face at various parties in the capital and wasn’t concerned about the situation of his fief. She had only found out later but Count Martin’s fief was one of the worst.

Because of the excessive taxes, people would either escape or were caught while trying to escape and were killed. Perhaps the miserable ending of Count Martin was his karma.

Almost every night, Hugo and Lucia would have dinner together, talk, then Hugo would find her in the bedroom. She knew that she should not be greedy for more but she sometimes couldn't bear the loneliness.

Lucia sometimes felt like she was standing dangerously on the thin ice of a deep lake and would rather have the ice break so she could sink to the bottom.

"Milady, I've been asked to escort you inside."

"...By who?" The only person who could ask someone to bring her inside was her husband, the Taran Duke but she still asked the maid.

"His Grace asked me to escort you inside."

"Why at this time...?"

Lucia followed the maid inside with an uneasy heart. There wasn't only one person waiting for her in the receiving room on the second floor.

In addition to Jerome, there was the family doctor, Anna. The moment Lucia saw Anna, she had an inkling of what was happening.

After all, not too long ago, she'd been acting like she didn't know what Jerome was talking about. She knew that Jerome would one day tell Hugo. However, she didn't think that Hugo would go to the extent of summoning the doctor and coming along with her.

Although, truthfully, it would have been a bit disappointing if he hadn't shown any interest.

Looking at Lucia who stood at the door like an uninvited guest, Hugo's expression hardened and he took big strides, approaching her. As his tall and large frame suddenly appeared in front of her, Lucia was momentarily shocked.

"Why..." He started speaking with repressed expression but stopped and grabbed her hand. He dragged her to the sofa and then sat beside her.

Anna slightly turned her head to peek at the ducal couple. It was her first time seeing the couple together up close, side by side.

She had had her doubts about whether the rumoredly terrifying knight-born Duke and the quiet and fragile-natured Duchess would look good together but seeing them together this way did not paint an awkward picture.

‘To be attacked by someone that big, Milady must have it hard.’

From Anna’s perspective as Lucia’s doctor, she inwardly criticized the Duke that was ignorant of his own strength.

“Milady, I heard you’ve not had your monthly guest the entire time you’ve been here.”

“...That’s correct.”

Lucia was uncomfortable with this situation.

She had personally made the choice to be infertile and had never bothered to look for treatment as she knew she could treat it by herself at any time but this situation made it seem like she was a patient with a deadly disease.

“You never had your first menstruation?”

“...I had my first menstruation.”

“Then when did you stop menstruating? Were you hurt or ill before it stopped? Does anything feel wrong inside?”

“ ... ”

“Wife, explain it properly to the doctor.”

Lucia was surprised at his voice which sounded firmer than usual. Turning her head to look at him, she saw his cold red eyes, watching her. For some reason, he didn’t give off a good feeling.

“...I took the wrong medication when I had my first period.”

“What medicine did you take? Did you feel poisoned?”



“I don’t really know what medicine I took and I don’t know about being poisoned. It didn’t hurt and till now, I haven’t been able to see anything strange with my body.”

Even when Lucia was looking for doctors in her dreams, those doctors could not properly figure out her symptoms. Even if she explained everything to Anna, it didn’t seem like Anna would figure it out but Lucia still hid her symptoms as much as possible.

This female disease was a delicate one. If the patient did not explain it properly, the doctor could not find an answer. Even more so if it was a disease the doctor had never heard about before.

No matter how many times Anna dug through her memories, she had never heard of symptoms where someone’s menstruation stopped after they took medicine.

“Milady, can you retrace your memories a bit more? What did the medicine taste like? For what reason did you take it? How much of it did you take? And what was the color and shape of this medicine?”

“...I don’t know. It happened when I was young and had no knowledge of medicine so I don’t remember anything.”

Hugo who had been sitting still, listening to the conversation, suddenly turned his body and stared at Lucia.

“Talk with me for a bit.”

He then made a gesture to the people standing around.

“Everyone get out.”

## Chapter 26

### The Ducal Couple (14)

As the words left the Duke's mouth and he looked at them, the people around quickly flooded out of the receiving room, leaving Hugo and Lucia alone.

There was a brief silence between them as they sat side by side on the sofa. He suddenly realized that this was the first time they had ever been together at this time and in this way.

"Why did you lie?"

"...I did not lie."

"You are hiding the truth from the doctor, aren't you? Not saying it is the same thing as lying. Why are you trying so hard to lie when you can't lie properly?"

'How did he know?' It was as though he was reading her mind when he looked at her.

He wrapped one arm around Lucia's waist and pulled her into his arms then spoke like he could see inside of her.

"Your expression says 'how did he know?'. You can't lie, it's too obvious."

Lucia simply wanted to escape from this situation. She twisted her body as she pushed away from him and stood up from the sofa.

"...It's a busy time for you at work yet you were interrupted. I'm sorry to have bothered you."

He watched the standing Lucia silently for a moment as he remained on the sofa then spoke fiercely.

"Do you blame me for being here?"

"You don't need to be worried."

“What?”

“I won’t get better anyways.”

He caught her wrist, pulling strongly and Lucia couldn’t help but fall into his arms.

She tried to struggle and get up but one of his hands held her arm in one place while the other hand held her chin, forcing their eyes to meet.

“What do you mean by that? Why should I be relieved if you won’t get better?”

“Didn’t I tell you from the start? That I cannot have children.”

Watching her wavering amber eyes, his red eyes also wavered.

Lucia twisted her chin and shook off his hand. His hand which awkwardly hung in the air for a bit, fell down.

She also moved and pulled out her arm which was held in his. Hugo felt bewildered in the face of her rejecting reactions.

“You weren’t interested nor did you ask why.” (Lucia)

“...”

“Why are you suddenly curious?”

He had only asked if she could prove it.

After that, he never asked if she truly could not have a child or if somewhere in her body was ill. Lucia thought that he had completely forgotten about it.

That his interest in her was only to that extent.

Therefore, it was pitiful that as the days went on, she could only continue to hope that her heart that was running to him would harden.

“Suddenly, huh. Is it bad for me to be curious?” (Hugo)

“Then I’m grateful.”

“...Don’t say it like that.”

“I apologize.”

Looking at her appearance as she gave short and icy answers then shut her mouth like she wouldn’t say anymore, his red eyes enlarged and flared up.

She was doing things she’d never done before and it was poking his nerves. He did not want to raise his voice as it was not a big deal anyways so he spoke in an even calmer voice.

“Vivian, do you want to quibble over something of the past?”

Lucia’s chest sank in disappointment.

‘If you call it something of the past then I can’t say anything.’

For him, it was just something of the past. Lucia just quietly shook her head.

“Right now, I am concerned about your body so, explain the exact symptoms to the doctor and get treated.”

His tone was even more affectionate than usual.

Even though she knew that he didn’t really have things like kindness or tender affection, every time she heard his affectionate voice, she would be entranced as though she had heard a love song then would wake up like she had been doused with cold water.

“I don’t want to do that.”

“Why?”

“If I do that, you would be troubled.”

“Why would I be troubled?”

“Because you don’t want me to have children!”

Her voice suddenly grew loud.

“...”

For a moment, Hugo could not say anything. It was not that he didn't want her to have a child but that he did not want to continue his bloodline itself.

And as to whether she could have a child or not, pregnancy was impossible.

But to make her understand that, he would have to tell her about many things that were hidden.

However, he did not want to dig into his memory and talk about those things again. To him, those things weren't just past events but a chilling nightmare.

Staring at Hugo who went silent, Lucia took his silence as confirmation and tried not to let her emotions get out of control.

“I misspoke. Accurately speaking, you've never had any interest.”

It was her intuition as a woman. He never wanted a child from her.

Despite that, his actions were contradictory as he never used any contraception. Lucia was rather bitter in that regard.

He wasn't even that concerned about it.

She wondered what kind of attitude he would have if she had gotten pregnant by chance.

Whether he would take the child away, have no interest in the child or perhaps turn around and never look for her again.

Whatever choice it was, they were all terrible.

“About having no interest...” (Hugo)

‘Isn't that you?’ Hugo mumbled inwardly. She had not even once, asked him about Damian. But, no matter how brazen he was, he knew he did not have the right to question her about that. He was married to her because he needed the status. not for her to take care of his son, they didn't have a contract for that.

“I didn’t know you hoped for me to be interested.”

Lucia’s heart sank down heavily in her chest. Somehow, looking at him, he seemed tired.

‘No!’

Already, from the moment he said that he could see through her lies, she had been full of anxiety.

Her nerves were on edge, thinking that her heart could also be read.

If he were to have an inkling of it and say something cruel like what he had said to Sofia Lawrence at the victory party that day...

‘My heart will burst. It would hurt so much that I’d rather die.’

He was a man that was tender to a woman as long as she kept a reasonable distance.

Just like he’d done for her, how many lovers in the past had he smiled with and given presents to?

It was because of this tenderness that those women, when they were notified of their break up, could not throw away their lingering attachment and clung to him.

‘I don’t want to become one of his past women.’

It would be good to live like this forever. Just like this. A fully materialistic life. A husband that gave her tender smiles and held her passionately every night.

She would not be greedy for more. Her sweaty fists were clenched tightly.

“I... don’t hope for anything. I have not forgotten my contract with you.”



Lucia hoped to look natural as she avoided his gaze and drew back a little from his arms but he was watching her sharply.

“Ha. Right. The contract.”

He gave a fake laugh and frustratedly swept through his hair.

It seemed to be only him that thought of forgetting about the contract and pushing it to a corner. She was obviously still strongly bound to its tenacious ropes.

“I can enjoy freedom in my private life and you would keep the door to your heart locked. That was our contract, right?”

He once again narrowed the distance that she tried to make as he grabbed her waist and pulled her in.

In this way, Lucia’s efforts were very easily undone. She was once again positioned in his embrace.

“But did you know? We didn’t decide on what would happen when someone does not keep to the contract.”

“Are you worried that I won’t keep to the contract?”

“Really, why are you like this? Why do you exaggerate my words like that?”

“...I’m sorry. I guess I twisted it a little.”

For a while, Hugo looked at his wife who seemed unfamiliar. It was not his usual wife that listened obediently.

Moreover, she kept avoiding his eyes showing rejection and separation.

‘The first time I met her... I didn’t say any word of support but she just went ahead and spoke.’

Perhaps, this was also her.

There was no way he could have seen sides of her that she never showed to him.

He originally didn’t like the fact that their conversation was being prolonged but he was rather pleased to see a new side of her.

It felt like he could see the real her for a moment other than the sight of her gently smiling and laughing.

“If I... give up on my freedom in my private life... will you also release the lock on your door?”

“...Huh?”

Lucia’s eyes grew round as she looked at him.

She couldn’t understand what he intended to do by saying that. Was this a trick of a playboy? He—

“I mean...”

He had an awkward expression as he slurred the ends of his words.

“Get treated.”

Lucia was disappointed at the change of topic.

“I don’t want to.”

“Vivian!”

“I cannot have a child so it’s okay for me to be unable to get one. But if I get treated, is it okay for me to have a child? Will you allow it?”

“...”

He sighed and massaged his temples with his fingers.

Even if her body got better, she couldn’t get pregnant. His Taran bloodline made it impossible for him to get just any woman pregnant.

Without fulfilling the conditions, the bloodline of Taran would not grow in any woman.

That was why he enjoyed himself with several women and never worried about the dangers of impregnating them.

Only a normal woman, one that did not possess the blood of Taran, could meet the



conditions to conceive the blood of Taran but as to what those conditions were, only the old man knew.

He drove the old man to live outside the castle walls and looked through the documents he had but there was nothing related to that.

Maybe it was just in the old man's memories or maybe there was another document about it, hidden somewhere nobody knew about. And so, to find out, he had simply and easily caught the old man and beat him up.

The old geezer that had claimed he wouldn't divulge the secrets of his family and held on without speaking, opened his mouth once he was imprisoned and realized that he would never see the sun again.

[The Taran male that will become the father of the child has to steadily administer his blood to the woman for over a year, then take her virginity.]\*

It really was a sickening condition. That condition also had to be completed before the woman was deflowered.

His wife was already on the wrong path. Even if it was possible to get pregnant regardless of such conditions, he never intended to leave a successor behind.

Just imagining an existence left in the world with his blood made him feel like he had steeped in shit.

Even though he was not at risk of impregnating anyone, it was his habit to ejaculate outside as he hated the idea of descendants that resembled himself.

But he unexpectedly met her. She was different from the start. Why was she an exception?

She was the first to make him hug, release into her and enjoy the after play. He had felt the satisfaction at planting his seeds inside of her.

He acknowledged that his indifference had hurt her. Under normal circumstances, she was very likely to be pregnant.

He had forgotten that she couldn't have a child and did not show any concern as to whether or not she was pregnant.

Her words asking why he was suddenly curious was full of resentment and bitterness.

It was fragmented information but being able to see her wounds sent a tingling sensation around his heart.

“If I get treated, I want to have a child. Even so, is it okay?”

She cannot get pregnant anyways. He could tell her that she was allowed to have any amount of kids she wanted.

That any amount she wanted was good. If he said that then she couldn't blame him afterwards if they didn't have any children.

However, he didn't want to deceive her that way. Even if he couldn't say the truth, he didn't want to lie to her.

“...I don't need a child.”

“If it is because of the succession issue, then I can write a memorandum. I don't care if I have to sign a contract that excludes my rights to succession.”

“It is not because of that. I... I don't want to leave my mark.”

“You already have a son.”

“That one—!”

There was too much to explain for that. The only one left who knew that he wasn't Damian's biological father was the old man.

There was no end to it once the dam was opened. He did not want to share the secrets of Taran with anyone.

He was not going to tell Damian either. He would embrace that knowledge alone and bury it with himself.

“He is... He's a little different. You... I didn't know you wanted a child that much.”

He realized that he really had only been looking at her exterior. He didn't know what was inside her heart at all.

"I'm sorry. I know the wife you want should not be such a woman."

"Vivian."

He sighed heavily.

"I don't mean to criticize you. I just didn't know so I am surprised."

"When we first talked about marriage, you said you don't care if I bear a child."

"That's..."

It wasn't that he didn't care but he knew that she couldn't get pregnant anyways and he didn't feel like explaining it, after all at the time, he only needed the status. A wife was just a freebie.

"You said you wouldn't divorce me."

Instantly, he became alert, his eyes flared and he snarled.

"Divorce? That's impossible."

Hearing the word 'divorce' come out of her mouth, his insides gradually began to boil.

"I told you from the start. No divorce. I definitely said that even if I die, you won't be able to escape."

"I know. The tradition of the Taran family. Of course I remember. But there is no tradition of not having children."

"A child or a divorce. As you asking me to make a choice?"

Her amber eyes trembled intensely.

Lucia turned her head away from him as her eyes stung as if tears would fall. To her, his words seemed to be asking her instead to choose one of the two.

"I... didn't mean it like that."

“Vivian, why can’t we keep being like this?”

“It is just my greed. I wish to have someone with me when I am alone.”

“Why would you be alone?”

“Surely, you aren’t saying that you will be with me forever?”

“...What?”

Looking at his expression akin to someone hearing a foreign language, something lit up from deep within Lucia’s heart.

His manner of speaking too, as if to pacify her, was irritating.

‘Even though he had no interest in what I think! Even though all he wants is an adequate and comfortable wife to push to the side!’

She wanted to see him wounded and hurting.

Even if she couldn’t make him hurt no matter what she did, then at the very least she wanted to make it awkward and difficult for him.

Such wicked thoughts uncontrollably rose in her heart.

“You don’t love me and I will never love you. So, what is there between us? How long do you think this type of relationship will last?”

# Chapter 27

## The Ducal Couple (15)

‘So what?’

Lucia expected him to answer that way.

Or say ‘What do you want me to do?’, ‘Wasn’t that the case from the beginning?’

She expected him to have a cold expression as he answered in an unfeeling manner. She worried frantically if she could return an answer even colder than what his reply would be.

Truthfully, she did not want to hurt him. She initially thought that was really how she felt but she realized that she truly did not want him to be in pain.

Lucia’s heart sank as she watched as a moment of inexplicable despair appeared on his face. She watched as the steel-like man expressed his pain in such a way.

He struggled to breath like a fatally wounded animal then he slowly closed his eyes and opened them.

Her heart desired to reach out to him and comfort him but her body was frozen at the sight of him.

She couldn’t wrap her mind around it as the hands holding her slightly trembled.

She couldn’t make herself move or say anything and it stayed like this for a short while.

He laughed bitterly then stopped and in that moment, it all disappeared like a mirage and his expression returned to its usual somewhat deadpan state.

The momentary glimpse of his emotional state before it disappeared like an illusion made her feel both confused and frustrated.

It made her feel as though she was trampling a soft cake.

“...Right. You already see the end.”

His voice was much calmer than it was cold.

‘He...’

Lucia felt like she had truly seen him for a short moment.

His always cold expression and tone was his armor. His coldness was not because he didn’t feel anything but to hide himself so he wasn’t exposed.

“Just now...” “What?” She wondered if she could have possibly dreamt for a while.

Even though she saw it, she couldn’t believe it. Looking at his current expression, it made it seem like she was truly mistaken.

As she continued to silently stare at him, he opened his mouth and spoke.

“I see. It was finished from the start. This is what you meant when you asked me to send you a rose flower, right?”

When he mentioned rose flowers, Lucia’s blood ran cold and she returned to reality, taking a moment to scold herself.

She was currently at a significant crossroad with him. What had started as her grumbling had at some point become something that was too late to turn back from.

“Yes... you’re right.”

She didn’t want to cling to an invisible ending so she asked him to wake her up with a rose flower.

She felt that if he announced their end by sending a rose flower, even if her senses had flown away for a bit, the shock would get her back to her senses.

“If you receive a rose flower from me, what were you planning on doing?”

Thinking that he was perhaps sounding out her feelings, her heart cooled down. She quickly took control of her slightly indecisive heart.

“That... I haven’t planned on doing anything. As you said, that would be the end. There is nothing after the end.”

“There... is nothing.”

He quietly repeated her words then spoke up.

“Is your condition unbreakable?”

“...Yes. I already promised you that I would not break it.”

Her love was a love where it didn’t matter to her if it got returned or rewarded.

Lucia never wished for that. Even in an estranged parent-child relationship, one sided love existed.

It was an impossible love between both of them.

Even if one initially starts out with self-satisfaction, someday, one start to wish for the other to answer, and the feelings for the one that does not answer slowly begins to turn to hate.

In this way, Lucia gradually hated him but she did not want to be eaten up by that hatred.

“ ... ”

Hugo knew he was being excessively greedy. Her words were correct. He knew he couldn’t return her feelings but he was shamelessly greedy for her heart.

He found out more about her in this brief conversation than he found out in the few months that they had been married. He had been indifferent.

She did not show it but he had no right to be angry.

There was nothing about her physical condition in the report that Fabian, his very capable investigator, sent after researching for about a month or so.

The fact that she could not have a child was a secret that no one else knew but she had confessed it to him.

She already revealed a part of her heart to him a long time ago, but he threw it away. He brushed aside the hand that she had cautiously held out to him a long time ago.

“There will be no divorce.”

“...Okay.”

“You are my wife.”

“...Okay.”

“No matter how it ends, you cannot change our relationship.”

“Okay.”

Her short and submissive answers were irritating his feelings. He grabbed her shoulders and knocked her down. Her body lay on the sofa displaying no resistance as he towered above her.

“Do you know what your answers mean?”

His hand grabbed her chin and his fingers slowly caressed her soft lips. At his mellow touch that held sexual desire, her eyelashes shook.

He was saying that regardless of her feelings, if he wanted, she had to open her body to him. Lucia avoided his gaze and replied while staring at the air.

“Yes.”

Hugo stared at her with his deep red eyes as his heart softly sank.

‘Excellent! You got yourself a perfect wife.’

He ridiculed himself. Just as he had hoped, he got a wife that was just like a doll. She was his. She was his wife.

But what he really had was her shell. And from now on, he had to continue living with and embracing this doll-like wife.

She kept a shell of herself here and hid her true self somewhere he couldn’t reach. But



what was the problem? That what he had in his arms and what he could see was simply just a shell?

But it wasn't about her heart. Even if he had her heart, what could he do with it?

He could hold onto her and keep her by his side for as long as he wanted without it. Just because he didn't have her heart didn't mean she was going anywhere.

Suddenly, Hugo realized something he couldn't see before. He realized the reason for the anxiety and despair that had overcome him before.

Anxiety because she wasn't greedy for anything he had and left no traces therefore she could leave without any hesitation. Despair because he couldn't open her heart which had been shut tightly.

No, the real anxiety and despair that he felt were not from these things. It was anxiety and despair about his wavering self.

Before he even realized it, his heart was in her hands. The worst outcome he never wanted had crept up on him.

After he became the Duke, he had thoroughly followed one principle. Only give back as much as you receive.

That was why he rejected the love that women gave to him; he could not return it.

Love and Hatred.

He had gone through all the extreme emotions a human being could possess, that was how he learned how to damage other people.

Hatred towards the dead duke and love for his blood brother. Love and hatred seemingly have no relation but they crashed onto him as though they were one.

He barely had any will then and despaired at his powerlessness. He was just a wild beast that lived as Hugh, not knowing anything.

His only worry then was how to kill his enemies and survive. From when he woke up in the morning till when he slept in the evening, it was only about his survival.

He met in brother and in the process became a human but he had to pay the price of learning emotions.

He loved his brother but because of that, he let his brother's life be controlled by the former duke.

His hatred for the dead duke soon became hatred for the Taran blood flowing within him once he learnt of its secrets after the Duke died.

No entity should be able to sway him.

The feeling of not being able to do things of his own will was sickening. It was already enough for him to experience the breathlessness and fear of losing his brother.

His heart had to be unshakeable and his mind, firm. He must not make anyone a special existence therefore her heart was not the problem.

The problem was *his* heart.

He had considered it simple curiosity and desire but his heart mocked him.

[You've fallen in love.]

'No. That isn't possible.'

He was swayed by her. He was starting to become afraid of losing her. He had reached such a pathetic state because of one woman.

He couldn't understand it. He couldn't accept such a conclusion. He rose from the sofa with huge motions and began to walk back and forth.



Lucia looked at the somewhat restless man and slowly lifted her body, sitting up. It would seem that today she got to see sides of him she had never seen before.

His restlessness did not last long. He quickly stopped, looked at her and spoke.

"Get treated."

And they were back to where they started. Lucia heaved a long sigh.

“Tell the doctor exactly what your symptoms are and receive a prescription. You have to know what the symptoms are and why you are this way, don’t you?”

“I could be pregnant. Is your decision that you don’t need a child changing?”

When he went silent, Lucia felt like screaming. ‘Just leave me alone! I would rather you were just interested in my body like you have been!’

“...there is no way a child will happen.”

“What you mean is... we will sleep separately?”

Lucia defiantly stared straight ahead, locking her eyes with his. He opened his mouth as though she had said something useless.

“Why do you think that’s only for making a child? You enjoy it too.”

“Don’t change the point. If I get treated and you keep coming into my bedroom, what would you do if I get pregnant? That’s what I want to know.”

“If so, it wouldn’t be my child.”

He spat out those words without hesitation and realized his mistake after the fact.

He said that because he already knew that pregnancy was impossible but as long as he concealed the truth, no matter who heard his words, they would seriously misunderstand it.

He regretted his words as her expression was already going terribly pale.

“Do you mean... you won’t admit that it is your child? Or... you will conclude that I was unfaithful?”

It was cruel. He ripped her heart to shred with his words.

Lucia once again recalled when she had overheard him and Sofia Lawrence’s conversation at the victory party.

At that time, his words were like a merciless blade as they cut into Sofia Lawrence.

Hugo knew that his words had hurt her a lot. That he had to apologize and comfort her.

However unlike his seemingly casual outward appearance, his inner self ran amok with confusion and anxiousness.

He couldn't even understand his own feelings. He had gotten sick and tired of the situation itself.

Of her stubbornly persisting self and of himself that couldn't tell the truth.

For the Hugo who disliked the complex situations and handled everything easily, this tangled situation and his feelings was overwhelmingly tiring.

"What I mean is..."

He began, stopped for a moment then continued, mumbling stiffly.

"For treatment... do as you please."

He turned around and left the receiving room. In no time, Lucia was left alone in the quiet receiving room, collapsing into the sofa.

Silent tears began to stream down her face. That night, he did not come to her bedroom.



The meal was prepared for only one person. Seeing this sight, Lucia felt disheartened but she sat down without saying anything.

But still, the spacious dining room seemed even more spacious.

"My master recently has a lot of official business to attend to."

Jerome, as though giving an excuse, explained why the Duke had again not accompanied her for dinner.

“I see. I am worried he will harm his health so I hope you will look over him even more.”

“Yes, Milady.”

Lucia had been eating dinner alone for a week now and he did not visit her bedroom at all.

She had also not been able to see his face for a few days.

He told her he was very busy. That he would be working all day in his office and would just have his meals there.

But Lucia’s senses told her that he was avoiding her.

He had once been busy and stayed in the office till Lucia fell asleep but at that time, he came in at dawn, grabbed her and slept.

Now, a week had passed. When she looked back at it, it was only a week but it felt like ages.

He was busy with work and had no time to think about a woman. Nothing seemed to be wrong but this week could become a month and then a year.

‘My head hurts...’

She habitually chewed her food but she did not know how it tasted. After she finished eating, she visited to Anna for headache medicine and went into her bedroom.

When she opened her eyes in the morning, she felt a little better but when night came and she lay in bed, it was the beginning of torture as she could not sleep with all kinds of thoughts going through her head.

‘Why did you do that? You ruined it.’

She blamed herself. ‘Why did you cause so much trouble?’

The reason she married him was for a peaceful and comfortable life. It was not for his affection.

From the start, she made a contract with him. She never had the shrewd thought of making the contract and denying it later.

‘He’s the bad one. It would have been better if we just remained a formal couple.’

She held some resentment towards him.

If he did not treat her so affectionately, her determination to live the rest of her life this way would never have been broken.

Now, his attitude cut into her like a knife and plunged her heart into hell.

‘You chose this. You promised to never regret this.’

She once again reproached herself. Why was she suddenly greedy when she gave up on having a child from the beginning?

She didn’t know the value of what she had and became greedy, losing it in the process.

Until recently everything was perfect. She ruined it.

No matter how much Lucia turned, she couldn’t sleep.

She sat up and curled her body into a ball, wrapping her arms around her knees. She couldn’t stop her gaze from falling on the bedroom door that never opened.

As time went on, her heart fell apart even more.

# Chapter 28

## The Ducal Couple (16)

He quickly read through documents and signed below them. For things that needed to be looked over separately, they were marked and placed to the side.

On the left were things that he had to process and ones the right were also things he had to process, piled up together.

No matter how much his eyes felt like falling off, he massaged his aching head and went through the papers but he still couldn't see the bottom of the pile.

At one point, he flung the pen away and leaned backwards to rest. Even though he closed his eyes, his head was full of things he needed to do.

He was fed up with it. He wondered how much more of this he would have to do.

'Maybe 10 more years? Come to think of it, how old will that boy be in 10 years?'

He would be 18. At that age, he would just be graduating from the Academy. If so, it wouldn't be in 10 years. Maybe in about 15 years?

That boy wasn't a dim-witted child so if he was taught for about 4-5 years, he would become useful.

'15 years, huh...'

Even the minimum amount was way too far.

'I have to do this crap for 15 more years...'

As it was raining, he looked outside the window, staring at the dim sky. It had been raining since morning.

At first, he never looked outside the window but eventually, three days ago, he stole a glimpse of Lucia walking through the garden without going to the balcony.

He didn't realize how unbecoming his behavior was and only grumbled about not seeing her because of the rain.

'If I don't see her now, I don't get to see her at all.'

He mumbled irritably then stopped himself with a chuckle.

'You are so pathetic. Why don't you just go and take a look?'

It was not far, he just had to go down the stairs and walk for a bit. At this time of the day, she was usually in the receiving room on the first floor.

The way she lived was monotonous and simple but it was regulated as she had things scheduled to do at almost every hour.

She didn't seem to want to go out these days so he knew her schedule more than he knew his own schedule.

'I am doing the stupidest things.'

He was now avoiding his wife. To be more precise, he was running away from his own heart.

'Love? How absurd.'

He continuously denied it. His heart should only belong to himself. He would never waver because of someone else.

Even with such confidence in himself, he didn't have the courage to meet her. He felt like if he met her, everything would crumble down in a moment.

With the excuse that there was a lot of work, he stayed late at night in his office, dealing with documents.

After which, he left the office and slept in his own bedroom that he had not used in the last few months.

'I can do well without her.'

That was his excuse to keep going. His rationality called him a loser and a coward but



he ignored it.

The first one or two days were fine.

‘Right. There is no way I am being swayed by a woman.’

He had felt elated like an immature child. But it didn’t take long for such confidence to disappear.

As time went by, his mood gradually declined and the contents of the documents failed to enter his head making his work speed drop.

Even though he spent the same amount of time on them, because the efficiency was lower, his working time grew longer.

He was uncomfortable with his current state that was very different from what he was used to and the work in his hands entered this vicious cycle.

But he still didn’t want to admit it. He was denying his withdrawal from her, and persisted in his stubbornness.

Unfortunately, there was no one around him to pull his ears and scream out the facts to him.

“Your Grace.”

The moment he heard that familiar voice from outside, annoyance swiftly swelled within him. The owner of that voice always brought a lot of work for him.

And as expected, once the owner of the voice entered, it was not a baseless notion.

Ashin, one of the Duke’s secretaries, the administrative officer, entered and found Hugo fiercely looking at him, making his hairs stand on end but he stayed firm and placed a pile of documents on the left side of Hugo’s desk.

Spitefully looking at the sight of Ashin furtively going away, Hugo spoke curtly.

“When is that boy’s vacation?”

Ashin was confident of being able to answer whatever question thrown at him,

anytime, anywhere but he started sweating at the Duke's unexpected question.

Fortunately for him, his mind was clear so he found the answer without pause.

"...I do know he doesn't have any vacations."

There was only one person that would make the Duke talk about vacations. The one who was appointed as successor and the only son of the Duke, Damian Taran.

Accurately speaking, he was the illegitimate child of the Duke but unless one wanted to die, they wouldn't say such words in front of the Duke.

No one amongst the Duke's vassals mentioned Damian in the presence of the Duke.

'They were still the same, doubting the possibility... '

They all thought that it could change and hoped for that change, after all the Duke was still very young and had just gotten married.

There were many that did not understand an illegitimate child becoming the Duke's legitimate heir.

However, Ashin was convinced that as long as there was no unexpected event, the successor of the Duke's name would be the illegitimate young lord.

This was something the Duke had gathered his vassals together and announced and the Duke had never once gone back on something that he had said.

The event of succession to the Duke send a huge ripple through the entire region. The fact that such a huge scandal was not even more widely spread was because the Duke's vassals had watched their mouths.

They were uncomfortable with the fact that an illegitimate child could perhaps become their master in the future and did not want to publicize it.

'Although he made such a loud entrance into society, the relationship of this father and son is completely... '

As soon as his son was six years old, the Duke threw him into a boarding school.

Frankly, the people around him tried to dissuade him. They told him that Damian was young and maybe he could try waiting one or two more years before putting him in boarding but the Duke snorted at them.

[Young? At six years old, he should be able to survive even if he's thrown into a desert.]

They were all shocked at the standard he held Damian to. But the words that came out of the young lord's mouth was even more astonishing.

[The survival rate of boarding school is surely more than that of a desert. Thank you for your generous actions.]

And so, the young lord that was grossly mature for his age, went to boarding school without any hesitation.



Two years passed and the Duke did not so much as mention his son making one wonder if he actually had a son, and likewise the young lord did not so much as briefly contact his home.

'I won't be surprised at all if it remains this way till he graduates in ten years.'

As irony would have it, the Duke's indifference towards Damian suppressed hostile forces and stopped them from acting hastily towards Damian.

'The Duke may have purposefully intended for that to happen.'

"He can't leave at all?" (Hugo)

Ashin quickly pushed away his straying thoughts.

"An outing is possible."

"Tell him to come then."

"...Do you mean right now? But the semester just began and we need to notify them at least one week in advance to get permission for an outing--"

"When did you start questioning my words?"

If you are given orders, just follow them.

Ashin immediately broke out in cold sweat and his expression grew stiff as he replied.

“...I understand. I will immediately send out a message.”

“I have sent someone to the capital to tell Fabian to prepare the family register and bring it back with him when he returns.”

‘So he wants to elevate the little lord’s status. If the little lord’s status is elevated... no one would be able utter any complaint.’

It had been announced that the little lord would become the Duke’s successor but he was still merely an illegitimate child.

But if his legal status was elevated, he stops being a demerit of the duke and becomes the perfect successor.

Those who were still expecting some kind of change in the future would have to give up once the little lord’s status was elevated.

‘The Duchess must have agreed to his entry into the family register. I did hear their marital relationship is very good but what will happen if the Duchess gives birth to a child? If she gives birth to a son, that will be a headache... ’

“It’s Elliot, your Grace.”

The instant those words fell, a scary-looking middle-aged knight walked in. The Knight Captain, Elliot Caliss appropriately paid his respects then lifted up the lengthy bamboo barrel.

Hugo received the barrel and pulled apart the top, revealing the rolled up letter within it.

Ashin felt a shiver run down his spine as he watched Hugo read the letter, narrowed his eyes and gave a dreary smile.

‘Fuck, he scares me more when he’s like that.’ (1)

“Mobilize seven people. I will leave the assignments to you and we will set out as soon

as they are ready.”

The rain was almost over but the sun was already setting on the afternoon.

It was different from the usual early departure at dawn, but the faithful Knight Caliss answered with only a few words and withdrew. (2)

“Hunting after a long time, it is.” (Caliss)

‘Human hunting.’

To Hugo’s mutterance, Ashin mumbled the hidden words to himself.

‘Whew... today’s dreams will not be peaceful.’

Ashin had once unintentionally followed the Duke to the battlefield a few years ago as an administrative officer although he was far away from the battlefield.

From time to time, he still saw scenes from that time and they made his heart palpitate.

His chills were not caused from seeing the cold-blooded killing. On the contrary, that was easier to see than the unrealistic and dizzying sight of the Duke slicing off someone’s throat and making their heads fly to the sky.

The Black Lion? Ashin found that nickname to be much embellished.

The Taran Duke who donned a black armor as he tore through the battlefield was understandably a godsend and most certainly a devil.

As he took in the sight of the Duke covered in blood like a wild beast and laughing comfortably, Ashin had muttered something without realizing it.

‘What a lunatic.’

He was startled as the words left his mouth and worried as to whether someone heard him but fortunately, his monologue was buried under the cries of soldiers drunk with the madness of war.

Ashin was someone who wasn’t scared of anything in the world. He did not hold back whatever he wanted to say and his capability matched his reckless personality that

made both his superiors and subordinates leave him.

But, from that day onwards, Ashin became a docile sheep in front of the Duke of Taran.

He realized how terrifying the Taran Duke was. Of course, the Duke was publically known to be a pretty scary person but he felt the duke was even more terrifying than how they described him.

In places other than the battlefield, the Duke put on a mask of good manners and his rough side could not be seen at all.

People who interacted with him only focused on the fact that he was a young duke and a great dancer.

That was why it was scarier. It was frightening that the bloody thing he witnessed on the battlefield could hide its madness and pretend to be a classic nobleman that had never held a sword before.

“Will the agenda be prolonged?” (Ashin)

“I know I have to go but I’m afraid it will take a while.” (Hugo)

“Then, during the time you are gone, the young lord could look over it.”

Hugo thought about it for a moment.

Although that child was young, he was of the Taran bloodline. It was difficult to think of him as another eight year old.

That boy had plunged a sword into the heart of a man whose ankle Hugo had caught in a trap and finished him off.

He recalled the past for a moment then returned to reality. That boy was never an innocent one.

There wasn’t any insanity coursing through his veins yet but who knew when it would appear. But still, he was currently the mild type.

According to the reports he continuously received, he wasn’t foolishly nice like his father but he didn’t have a cruel temperament.

The first time Hugo met Damian, if he hadn't seen eyes similar to that of his dead brother then he would have killed him on the spot and disposed of him.

No matter how mild he was, malicious intent wouldn't fly. Compared to Damian, his wife was a docile rabbit.

He couldn't help but get worried that it would just be the two of them. He didn't find it strange at all as he subconsciously worried about her.

"Why don't you personally go get him?"

"...Huh?"

"Make sure to warn him when he arrives, to give the proper respect to his mother. If I return and hear anything strange..."

"Ah, yes. I will make sure there is nothing to worry about."

Shortly after Ashin withdrew, Jerome rushed into the office after hearing that the knights were preparing to leave.

'I think it began the day after we called the doctor...'

He was unsure as to what happened between the two of them but from that day onwards, their relationship grew strange.

His master was taking the initiative to distance himself from her Grace. Saying he was busy was just an excuse.

His master always had a lot of work however it was never to the extent where he couldn't eat or sleep.

According to the maids, they also slept separately. Every time he looked at her Grace as she tried to act like everything was fine even though she was dismayed, he felt his heart ache.

'Don't do this, master.'

For the first time ever, he felt rebellious towards his master in his heart.

He could barely stop himself from asking his master why he would leave on a long term absence without resolving this situation.

Jerome brought in warm tea just as usual and its delicate fragrance filled the air. He poured the tea, filling up the empty cup.

“What should I do about your evening meal?”

“Mmm, you don’t need to prepare it. I will be leaving soon.”

Hugo raised his head and lifted the cup of tea to his mouth.

“I will be going hunting but I don’t know the exact schedule.”

“...it’s already late. How about leaving tomorrow at dawn?”

“No, I am about to get ready and I already ordered for it.”

“As for Milady...”

“Inform her for me.”

“...Did Milady make a huge mistake?”

Jerome spoke firmly as Hugo gaze fell on him.

“Even if she did make a mistake, I hope you can generously forgive her. For the past few days, Milady has not exchanged any words with your Grace.”

“This is not something you have a say in. You are crossing the line.”

“Yes. I have to say something presumptuous. Milady is the Duchess. She is different from the other women you were fascinated with for a bit and then threw away. You have to treat her valuably.”

Hugo stared at Jerome with slightly widened eyes. Watching Jerome’s slightly downcast gaze as he stubbornly persisted, Hugo narrowed his eyes.



## Chapter 29

### The Ducal Couple (17)

“Milady came to this unfamiliar northern region alone, not knowing anybody, yet she never complained about her situation being difficult or uncomfortable. If your Grace were ignore Milady, then she would truly be alone.”

Hugo actually began to suspect just where Jerome came out from today to have such a completely different temperament but when he thought about it, there was no denying that Jerome was Fabian’s blood brother.

To speak without any fear was Fabian’s trademark.

Hugo’s red eyes glowed even redder.

“These days, Milady...”

“Shut up.”

“Your Grace.”

“I dare you to say one more word...”

Feeling the murderous gaze on him, Jerome shut his mouth and lowered his gaze.

The Duke was not a master that needlessly picked on someone’s faults but he was a master that would never tolerate challenges to his authority.

The criteria depended on if someone were getting above themselves. Jerome did not have the authority to butt into the ducal couple’s private relationship.

It wasn’t because Jerome was a steward. No one in Roam had such authority. Hugo was extremely displeased with the situation.

He wondered if she had sent him as she had enough reason to do so. But this was Jerome.

The Jerome that did not unnecessarily interfere with his usual work, and could distinguish between the things Hugo alone could do and the things Jerome could deal with himself.

Therefore, Jerome's unusual behavior got on his nerves. Hugo already knew that Jerome took care of her more than the usual.

He did not doubt Jerome's loyalty as a steward but he was strangely irritated.

"Impressive. Did she ask you to come annoy me?"

Even though he knew that there was no way she had, he felt extremely twisted inside.

"No, Your Grace! Milady would never—!"

Crash!

A teacup flew past Jerome's face and shattered to pieces on the floor as soon as Jerome opened his mouth.

"I told you to shut up."

Hugo swiftly got up and walked out of the office while Jerome sat down with a paling face.

He made a mistake. A terrible result of his needless interference. If Fabian were here, he definitely would have told him that their relationship wasn't one he should interfere with.

'I've let down Milady's honor.'

His first rebellion against his master ended with his tail completely trampled. He unnecessarily intervened and even created a misunderstanding.

Jerome sighed and began to sweep the pieces of the tea cup that was scattered everywhere.

The fact that the cup did not fly at his forehead meant that his master was already pretty tolerant.

‘I’ll ask Fabian for some advice when he comes.’

Useless mouth! And so he began to sharply berate himself.



Lucia returned home early from her outing with Kate, using the excuse that she wasn’t feeling well.

She didn’t feel like talking or going horseback riding. Right after she returned from seeing Kate, the doctor scarily came to visit.

“Milady.”

Anna looked at loss for what to do and she couldn’t meet Lucia’s eyes, seemingly nervous.

That day, he had left after saying that she could do as she pleased but from the next day onwards, he continuously sent Anna.

“Milady, his Grace the Duke calls me every evening and asks me how the treatment is going.”

Anna said with an expression that read ‘please save me’. When the Duke called Anna, he didn’t say any other thing.

He would just asked how the treatment was going but that alone gave Anna enormous pressure.

“Please, honestly tell me the symptoms that you know about.”

Because of this, in just a few days, the anger in Lucia’s heart steadily increased. She felt like she was deceived by him and couldn’t break free.

She felt like going to his office immediately and giving him a slap.

‘Alright. I’ll do what you want me to do.’

Lucia opened her mouth and began to explain her symptoms. She explained it exactly how she explained it to the doctors she searched for in her dream.

Yes, she already knew a cure for it but she had no intention of using it. However, if Anna found another cure, she didn't plan on refusing treatment.

But the chances of that happening were close to none. She'd met countless doctors in her dream numerous times, but none of them could cure her.

It was an amazing coincidence and luck that she was able to get a treatment method from that wandering doctor.

She didn't think such coincidence and luck would happen a second time.

And as expected, Anna looked confused after hearing her explanation. She looked bewildered by the fact that Lucia took mugwort herb and cause her menstruation to stop. She didn't seem to know anything about it.

"I'm sorry, Milady. To be frank, my ability is lacking so I do not know how to treat you. But I will definitely figure out a way."

Anna resolutely assured her. Lucia sat absent-mindedly for a little while then went out into the garden.



Hugo left his office extremely displeased and thoughtlessly walked till he stepped outside.

The rain had stopped but there was no sign of the sun.

'I guess the day is ending like this.'

When he realized it, he was already in the garden. He quickly turned around and tried to leave but before he could do that he discovered her.

She was bent over in a bow, looking at an almost blossoming flower bud. He stood still for a while, then his feet turned towards her.

Lucia straightened her waist and turned to see him approaching her, instantly, she found herself falling into a fantasy as the air around her changed.

Everything around her blurred and all she could see was him. Lucia knew she had

experienced something like this before.

‘When I was in the capital... the day of the Knight’s parade...’

It was the day that she saw him for the first time in reality, not in her dreams.

She *was* angry with him. Her condition was terrible because she could not sleep properly as every night, she stared at the bedroom door that never opened.

And just a while ago, she wanted to slap him if she ever saw him. But once she saw him, all the anger that had piled up, instantly melted away like salt dissolved in the water.

‘I am such an idiot...’

She knew that he was unattainable and thought she had locked down her feelings but her heart seemed to slip through the crevices.

While her heart bubbled over, it also hurt.

‘I love him.’

She didn’t know what to do. Just like his countless past lovers, she couldn’t keep her heart to herself.

‘He must not find out.’

If he took one step closer to her, she would take two steps backwards. She didn’t want to be sent a rose.



Reaching the end of her breathtaking realizations, Lucia turned towards him and smiled.

‘Ah...’

Hugo felt the annoyance and irritation that had been bothering him dissipate the instant he saw her smile.

It was as refreshing as waking up in the morning after a good night's sleep. Hugo finally woke up from his folly.

What he was afraid of wasn't her existence, it was his wavering. Simply imagining never seeing her smile again made him feel like he couldn't breathe.

'I told you so', his heart seemed to mock him.

"Look at this, won't the flower be blooming soon? I think it will bloom fully in a few days."

Hugo was momentarily tongue-tied when she began to speak to him as though nothing had happened.

"...I see." (Hugo)

Her refreshed expression made him feel miserable. Unlike his fretful self, she had her usual peaceful expression.

"I heard you've been busy. Did you come out to get some air?" (Lucia)

"Mmm... the busy stuff is almost done but something came up so I will have to leave for a while."

"Ah."

Lucia's face changed for an instant then she gave another sweet smile.

"How long will it take? Will you be gone for a long time?" (Lucia)

"I don't know the exact details so it could be a while. Why are you alone? What of your maid?" (Hugo)

"I sent her on an errand. Since the rain was over, I thought of having a cup of tea here. If it's okay, would you like to join me?"

"...Sure."

He just had some tea a while ago but he didn't refuse her.

After a while, a couple of maids came, bringing a folding table and a tea basket. The table was placed at a suitable place and the two of them sat facing each other.

“I was worried since it’s rarely dry nowadays, but I am glad that the rain stopped mid-day.” (Lucia)

“What have you been doing?” (Hugo)

“Just the same stuff as usual. Take care of the garden and then reading books. That’s strange. You are talking to me as though we haven’t seen each other in a long time. It was just a few days.”

Was it just a few days? He felt like it was a very long time but to her, it was just a few days.

He found her spiritedness admirable and felt remorseful. He reached out and caressed her soft cheek. Her soft skin gave him the illusion that he would leave marks if he exerted even a little more strength.

She was weak. Yet this frail existence threatened him so strongly.

“...That day, I made a mistake and I want to apologize to you. It wasn’t my intention to treat you as an unfaithful woman.”

“...”

“What I meant was... offsprings are rare in the Taran family. Getting pregnant will be difficult... and I didn’t want you to get disappointed after hoping for a child.”

His excuse did not really touch Lucia’s heart. After all, if offsprings were rare then it would be more convincing for his attitude to be supporting her pregnancy rather than rejecting it.

But when she saw how he was carefully contemplating his words, a laugh escaped from her mouth.

“Okay.”

She tried to laugh but tears fell down from her eyes. The wounds she had received at that time no longer hurt. She had already forgiven him.

His tender words and gentle caresses made her heart ache with happiness.

Looking at the tears flowing down her cheeks, he wasn't sure what he was supposed to do and stood up.

He took a step around the tea table towards her and wrapped his arms around her.

"I'm sorry. I was wrong." (Hugo)

His embrace and scent that she'd been missing made her feel like she had gone from hell to heaven in an instant.

'We can go back... to how we were before.'

To how they were the last few months. It was fine even if their relationship was a castle of sand and no one knew when it would collapse.

When one couldn't see the waves, they would assume it was all okay. Nothing was resolved, but it was fine to think about later things, later.

Her heart felt like it had overcome the heavens and was rather calm. Once she accepted her changing heart and wasn't anxious about it, she felt at peace.

Her heaven and hell depended on how she made up her mind.

'He... at the very least, he treats me with love.'

She was unsure as to how he treated his past lovers but she decided to think that she was a little more special.

It was not conceit but she had to plant that much confidence in herself so she could stand firmly and love him.

'Also, I have an advantage.'

She was his legitimate wife. It was a justification that none of his past lovers ever had.

'I won't cling to you. I also won't subdue myself to please you.'

She wouldn't have such a miserable love.



She won't beg for his love.

She won't play the virtuous wife, obeying everything he says unconditionally.

She would only do as much as she could, loving him with all of her might but only just enough that she wouldn't start hating him.

It made her wonder if he had ever received love from a woman that did not cling to him.

The thought that maybe she could make him flustered was amusing.

'It is fine even if it takes a lifetime. If someday, you tell me that you love me, I won't feel like my life has been in vain.'

If she lived like this for one year, five years, even ten years, perhaps she could slowly influence him. Even a little drizzle can become something scary.

Lucia lifted her head a little from within his embrace.

"You said you were wrong, right?" (Lucia)

"Huh? Yea." (Hugo)

"I'll forgive you but I have two conditions."

"Conditions? What are they?"

He had an expression that said he didn't like the word itself.

"The first is... a kiss of reconciliation."

His eyes widened slightly then curved. As Hugo's face drew closer, she closed her eyes.

Their lips touched lightly at first, then met again, with his lips sucking hers in this time.

He suckled and swallowed her tender lips countless times in his mouth. His tongue slipped through the cracks of her mouth, gently and carefully stroking the innards of her mouth then pushed it deeper, stimulating her.

The long and sweet kiss that was neither light nor heated but breathtaking finally came to an end.

He spoke with his lips almost touching hers.

“The second is?”

Because it seemed like he would kiss her again as he drew closer, she held him back and turned her head slightly.

“I am modifying the contract. No matter how I think about the freedom in your private life part, it makes me feel bad. That is practically telling me you’re going to be cheating. Please don’t go making lovers elsewhere.”

He was taken aback and couldn’t help but stare at her for a bit then spoke in a slightly crestfallen voice.

“...I won’t make any.”

He felt a little offended. After he married, he hadn’t even looked at other women but unfortunately, he couldn’t refute his track record of being a malicious playboy.

“Additionally, if you get disgusted or tired of me and you want to leave me for another woman, please tell me first. I do not wish to hear it from another person’s mouth.”

He stared at her for a while then muttered bitterly.

“I forgot for a moment. In your head, I am a pretty terrible guy.”

It was a mysterious feeling to be marked as a bad guy rather than a nice guy by the woman he loved but again, he couldn’t refute this.

“I can’t give any excuses.”

He mumbled then grabbed her hand, kissing it.

“As you wish.”

He straightened his upper body and spoke to the maid that had been fretfully standing at the side for a while.

“What is it?”

“Sir Elliot has asked me to pass on his words; he is ready and waiting for the order to depart.”

Hugo had finally realized his feelings towards her but nothing could change right now. He still could not promise her anything.

There were also many things that he couldn't reveal to her. He needed more time to decide what to and what not to show to her.

The hunt this time should give him the time he needed.

“You don't need to see me off. Return.”

“...Yes. Please return safely.”

Watching his back as he walked away, Lucia's heart throbbed and she clutched her chest tightly.

She hoped desperately, that he would never leave her like this someday.



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